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THE EMPEROR OF ELAM
AND OTHER STORIES

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

CONSTANTINOPLE OLD AND NEW

STAMBOUL NIGHTS

PERSIAN MINIATURES

THE EMPEROR OF ELAM
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

H. G. DWIGHT

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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1920

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TO

J. R. M. TAYLOR

COLONEL, UNITED STATES ARMY,

HISTORIAN OF THE PHILIPPINES:

ARCH IRONIST,
EX-EDITOR OF "THE INFANTRY JOURNAL,"
LATE LIBRARIAN OF THE ARMY WAR COLLEGE, WASHINGTON,
SOMETIME MILITARY ATTACHÉ AT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, CONSTANTINOPLE,
MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI,
INSTIGATOR OF OR ACCOMPLICE IN TOO MANY OTHER ACTIVITIES HERE TO BE NAMED;
WHO YET FOUND TIME TO INVENT
ONE, NOR THE LEAST SEDUCTIVE, OF THE ENSUING FABLES,
AND WHO COURTEOUSLY PUT IN THE WAY OF HIS COLLABORATOR
TWO OF THE MOST EXASPERATING AND PROFITABLE EXPERIENCES
OF A CAREER BY NO MEANS BARREN OF SUCH ACCIDENTS:

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS
OF HIS OBLIGED AND ADMIRING FRIEND
THE AUTHOR.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Of the stories in this collection, three originally appeared in *The Century Magazine* ("Like Michael," copyright, 1916; "The Emperor of Elam," copyright, 1917; "The Emerald of Tamerlane," copyright, 1918), two each in *The Bookman* ("Unto the Day," copyright, 1904; "Studio Smoke," copyright, 1905), in *Scribner's Magazine* ("The Bathers," copyright, 1903; "Henrietta Stackpole *Rediviva*," copyright, 1904), and in *The Smart Set* ("Susannah and the Elder," copyright, 1905; "The Undoing of Mrs. Derwall," copyright, 1906), and one each in *The Associated Sunday Magazines* ("Martha Waring's Elopement," copyright, 1904), in *The Outlook* ("The Pagan," copyright, 1905), in *Short Stories* ("Castello Montughi," copyright, 1908), and in *The Sunset Magazine* ("The Bald Spot," copyright, 1909).

It may be added that the names of three of these stories are not the ones first copyrighted and that at least two of them have been completely recast, while not one of them has been left untouched in its earliest state. The writer nevertheless takes this occasion to express to the editors and publishers of the above periodicals, as well as to Mr. W. J. O'Brien and to Messrs. Small, Maynard and Company—who made use of "The Emperor of Elam" in *The Best Short Stories of 1917*—his thanks both for their former hospitality and for their present courtesy in permitting him to reassemble his work. Nor would this small payment of indebtedness be complete without mention of Colonel J. R. M. Taylor, who wrote the first draft of "The Emerald of Tamerlane," and who generously allows it to be reprinted over the signature of his collaborator.

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LIKE MICHAEL

THE EMPEROR OF ELAM
AND OTHER STORIES

LIKE MICHAEL

I

WHAT was he like?

H'm! That's rather a large order. What are people like, I wonder? Some of them are like dogs. There are plenty of poodles and bull pups walking around on two legs. Some of them are like cats. Some of them are like pigs. A few of them are like hyenas. More of them are like fishes in aquariums. A lot of them are like horses—of all kinds, from thoroughbreds and racers to those big, honest, comprehending, uncomplaining creatures that drag drays. But I have a notion that most of them are like you and me.

What are we like, though? If we happen to be like Greek gods—which we don't!—if we have red hair or vampire eyes or humps on our backs, if we harpoon whales or compose operas or put poison in our mother-in-law's soup, it is possible to make out for us a likely enough *dossier*. Yet how far does that

dossier go? It tells less than a tintype at a county fair. Vamp eyes or godlike legs, even the ability to compose operas, have nothing to do with the way we react when we inherit a billion dollars or lose our last cent, when our wives get on our nerves or the boiler of our ship blows up at sea. And what on earth are you to say about people like Michael, who are neither tall nor short, fat nor thin, good nor bad? Or people whose wives never get on their nerves and whose boilers never blow up? They have their *dossier* all the same. Why not? They do nine-tenths of the work of the world. They lay its stones one upon another. They commit their share of its follies, suffer their share of its sorrows, and pay more than their share of the bill.

What was Michael like? My good man, you loll there with your ungodlike leg over the arm of your chair and you blandly propose to me the ultimate problem of art! One would think you were Flaubert —or was he Guy de Maupassant?—who made it out possible to tell, in words that have neither line nor colour, that are gone as soon as you have spoken them, how one grocer sitting in his door differs from all other grocers sitting in doors. I have spent hours, I have lost nights, over that wretched grocer; and I haven't learned any more about him than when I began: except to suspect that Maupassant—or was it Theophile Gautier?—wanted to be Besnard and Rodin too. I grant you that no grocer looks precisely like another. But that isn't Maupassant's business

—to tell how a grocer looks. The thing simply can't be done. Nor is it enough for your grocer to sit in his door. He must say something, he must do something, or words won't catch him. And then how do you know why he said or did that particular thing, or what he would say or do at another time?

And you have the courage to ask me, between two whiffs of a cigarette, what Michael was like! How the deuce do I know? I never had anything particular to do with him. He was like fifty million other people with lightish hair and darkish eyes and youngish tastes, whom neither their neighbours nor their inner devil have beaten into distinction. If I tried to tell you what a man like that is like, I would land you in more volumes than "Jean Christophe." I can only tell you what he was like at two very different moments of his life, in two entirely different places.

Perhaps you are naturalist enough to construct the rest of him out of that. I, for one, am not. But it's astounding how little we know about people, really, and how childishly we expect miracles of each newcomer. It isn't as if anybody ever did anything new. How can they? Nobody is radically different from anybody else. The only thing is that some of us are a little harder or a little softer, some of us are longer-winded or shorter-winded, some of us see better out of our eyes or have less idea what to do with our hands. That isn't all, though. There are other things, outside of us, for which we are neither to blame nor to praise—the houses we hap-

pen to be born in, the winds that blow us, arrows that fly by day and terrors that walk by night. And then there are other people. They come, they go, they get ideas into their heads, they put ideas into ours. It may be pure bull luck whether you are a grocer sitting in your door for a Maupassant to scratch his head over, or something more—definite, shall we say?

Michael, now: why should a man like that disappear? Would you disappear? Would I disappear? Why on earth should Michael have disappeared? Surely not for the few thousand dollars that disappeared at the same time. Nothing was the matter with him. He had a good enough job. He was married to a nice enough girl. He would have prospered and grown fat and begotten a little Michael or two to follow in his footsteps. But those reaping and binding people take it into their heads to send him over there, and he suddenly vanishes like a collar-button in a crack. And we all make a terrific hullabaloo about it—when the thing to make a hullabaloo about is that one man may get all geography to reap and bind in, while another may never get outside his valley.

The thing in itself was infinitely simpler than one of Michael's confounded reapers and binders.

II

I suppose you know Aurora—Mrs. Michael as was? I began stepping on her toes at dances twenty

years ago, and I believe I could tell you what she is like. This country is a factory of Auroras. Dozens of her pass under that window every day, all turned out to sample as if by machinery, all run by the same interior clockwork, all well made, well dressed, well educated—in the American sense; also well able to milk a cow or to carry one on their backs, but preferring to harangue clubs all day, to dance all night, in any case to circumvent the ingenuity of life in playing us nasty tricks. They won't do anything they don't like, and they shut their eyes to the dark o' the moon.

Just what Aurora wanted of Michael, I can't say. As the poet hath it, there is a tide in the affairs of women which, taken at the flood, leads God knows where. But these things are not so awfully mysterious. There was a period in Aurora's history when, it being reported to her that the simple Michael had likened her eyes to Japanese lanterns, she was not displeased. And I have been told on the best authority that even a suffragette may not be averse to having her hand held. Whether Michael first grabbed Aurora's or whether Aurora first grabbed Michael's doesn't much matter. There came a later period when they were both able to recall that historic event with considerable detachment.

Aurora likewise lived to learn that there are other ways of circumventing the tricks of life than by reaping and binding. She thirsted for higher things, for wider horizons, than those of Zerbetta, Ohio.

Above all human trophies she burned for two which cohabit not too readily under one roof—Culture and Romance. So when Michael was unexpectedly ordered to the East she accompanied him only as far as Paris.

My relations with her, I regret to say, were such that she did not confide to me what she thought when Michael failed to turn up again. You can easily perceive, however, that Michael translated, Michael probably murdered, Michael made, at all events, for once in his life, mysterious, was a very different pair of sleeves from the Michael she had not considered important enough to see off on his Orient Express. Aurora was never the one to miss that. It put her in the papers. It made her a heroine. It invested her with the romance for which she yearned. It also invested her with extremely becoming mourning. Yet I fancied once or twice that I detected in her a shade of annoyance. She was capable of choosing an occultist for her second husband, but in the bottom of her heart she hated people to be as indefinite as Michael. She naturally did not like, either, a rumour of which she had caught echoes, that Michael had run away from her.

Well, when Aurora heard that I was going to Constantinople, she asked me to find out what I could. It was quite a bit afterward, you know, and she had already entered the holy bonds of wedlock with her occultist. But she couldn't quite get over that exasperating indefiniteness of Michael's. She

wanted to put a tangible tombstone over him—with a quatrain of her own composition, and the occultist's symbol of the macrocosm. Wayne, too—Michael's uncle, and one of the reaping and binding partners—suggested that I quietly look about once more. What the partners principally minded, of course, was their money. Yet it wasn't such a huge sum, and Michael really did them a good turn after all, the ironic dog. They could well afford the fat reward they offered. They got no end of free advertising, you know, what with the fuss the State Department made, and all. People who had sat in darkness all their lives, never having heard of a reaper and binder, suddenly saw a great light when the Bosphorus was dragged and Thrace and Asia Minor sifted for an obscure agent of reapers and binders.

Such are the advantages of getting yourself robbed and murdered, as compared to those of working your head off to keep your job. Michael, to be sure—I ended by finding out all about Michael, long after I had given him up. It was nothing but an accident. I wonder, though, that we go on believing there's anything in this world except accident. And the beauty of this accident is that I can't claim that reward I need so much—one of the beauties. It was altogether, for Aurora and Michael even more than for me, such a characteristic case of missing what you look for and finding what you don't.

I never told Wayne. I never told Aurora. I never intended to tell you. Another accident! But isn't it aggravating how one's best stories always have to be kept dark?

III

So the romantic Aurora, as I told you, sat in Paris like a true American wife, inviting her soul in the Louvre—both *musée* and *magasins*—while the humdrum Michael set forth for that bourne whence he was not to return, with his reaper and binder under his arm. What he did with it doesn't matter. In fact I believe he did very little with it. He wasn't born to reaping and binding. Reaping and binding had been thrust upon him—by the uncle to whom he applied at a desperate moment for a job. Like most of us, you see, he didn't know what he wanted. I'm not sure he ever found out. Aurora, however, must have helped him in a back-handed way to find out that he hadn't got what he wanted. And so did that sudden journey of his. He had never been anywhere before in his life.

I make fun of poor Aurora, who after all had perhaps divined in poor Michael, at the flood of her tide, what she was really after. But I found it rather quaint, I must confess, that he, the reaper and binder of Zerbetta, Ohio, should be caught by Stambul. Yet why not? I myself am unaccountably moved by reapers and binders, by motors and dynamos and steam engines, by all manner of human

ingenuities of which I know nothing and could never learn anything. Why should not Michael have been moved by things as foreign to him? Moreover has there not always been in the Anglo-Saxon some uneasy little chord that has made him the wanderer and camper-out of the earth, that nothing can twitch like the East?

Michael took an astonishing fancy to that bumpy old place, and to those mangy dogs and those fantastic smells and those inconvenient costumes and those dusty Bazaars and all the trash that is in them. He bought quantities of it. Rugs and brasses and I don't know what uncannily kept turning up long after he had dropped through his crack. Aurora received them tearfully as tributes to herself, and I believe they paved the way for her next experiment. Michael's successor is an antiquary as well as an astrologer, and he keeps an occult junk-shop on a top floor in Union Square.

That junk, as it happened, was just what played so fateful a part in Michael's adventure. He bought a good deal of it from a certain antiquity man who knew English better than any one else Michael ran across in the Bazaars. Finding Michael a promising customer, the antiquity man said he had better stuff stored away in a *khan* outside the Bazaars. And Michael, of course, was delighted to go and look at it. Do you wonder?

The *khan* was one of those old stone houses in Mahmud Pasha that have a Byzantine look about

them, with their string-courses of flat bricks, the heavy stone brackets of their projecting upper storeys, the solid iron cages of their windows, and their arched tunnels leading into courts within courts, where grape-vines grow and rugs lie fading in the sun. The antiquity man took Michael up some stone stairs into one of the galleries overlooking a court, and then into a series of dirty little stone rooms full of all sorts of queer-looking boxes and bundles. And some of the boxes and bundles were opened with great ceremony, and Rhodian plates were brought forth for Michael to admire—Persian tiles, Byzantine enamels— You know the sort of thing.

Michael, our reaper and binder, liked it. I can't say how intelligently he liked it; but he had discovered a new world, and he liked it well enough to go back again and again. I must confess that I don't recollect very much about it, myself. I do remember, though, that the most outlandish-looking people—Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Persians, Tartars, Heaven knows who—carry on outlandish-looking activities there. Any number of forges and blow-pipes flare in those dark stone rooms, where goldsmiths and silversmiths make charms, amulets, reliquaries, little Virgins to hang around your neck, little votive hands and feet to hang on icons, silver rings for Turks who think it wicked to wear gold, and filigree chains, pendants, and lamps in the Byzantine tradition. That's where most of the an-

tiques sold in the Bazaars come from. And devilishly well-made a lot of them are, too. I know a Byzantine gold chalice in a museum in England, decorated with St. Georges of the tenth century, that came out of that *khan* not twenty years ago! Admirable coins and gems come from there too, to say nothing of Tanagra figurines. Did you ever hear of a Chalcedonian figurine? Not many other people have, either. But plenty of real ones used to be dug up on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus; and clever Greek potters copy them and rename them for tourists. However, it isn't all fake. There are real artists in those dark little stone rooms. And there are real antiques—some of them stored away, some of them undergoing a final dilapidation to suit them for the critical eye of fake collectors.

Michael liked it all so much that he spent more time in that extraordinary maze than was good for his reapers and binders. The people got to know him by sight, and they let him rummage around by himself.

IV

He turned up one afternoon to look at some pottery, and the antiquity man happened to be out. Michael was therefore given coffee and left more or less to his own devices. Nobody could talk to him, you see, and the antiquity man was coming back.

Michael prowled mildly about, finding nothing much to look at but packing-cases and kerosene tins

—those big rectangular ones that everybody in the Levant hoards like gold. He presently recognised, however, on top of a pile of boxes, a basket that he had seen at the antiquity man's shop in the Bazaars —a basket, with an odd little red figure in the wicker, containing embroideries. He managed to get it down, and found it unexpectedly heavy. It turned out to be full this time of broken tiles. He poked them over. Each bit was worth something—for a flower on it, or an Arabic letter, or a glint of Persian lustre. But as he poked down through them, what should he come across but some funny-looking metal things: some round, some square, some with clock-work fastened to them. It suddenly occurred to him to wonder if bombs looked like that! He proceeded, very gingerly, to replace the bits of tile.

Just then he became aware that the antiquity man had come in quietly and was looking at him.

"What the devil have you got here?" asked Michael, with a laugh. "An ammunition factory?"

The antiquity man shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I have better than that. I have a Rhages jar for you to look at, if you will come this way."

A Rhages jar! I don't suppose Michael had ever until that moment heard of a Rhages jar. However, he followed the antiquity man into another room even more crowded with boxes and tins; and there, to be sure, the Rhages jar was put into his hands. But the place was so dark he could hardly see it.

"If you will excuse me another moment," said the antiquity man, "I will get a light."

He was gone, as he said, only a moment. When he came back a servant followed him, carrying a candle —a big porter whom Michael already knew by sight, in baggy blue clothes and a red girdle. Michael nodded to him, and the man salaamed. Then the antiquity man pointed out to Michael, by the light of the candle, the beauties of the Rhages jar. As he did so another man came in, an older man with a grizzled beard. He gravely saluted Michael and took the candle from the porter, who went out. The porter very soon returned, however. This time he carried a tray on which was one of those handleless little cups of Turkish coffee in a holder of filigree silver. The antiquity man set down the Rhages jar.

"Won't you have a cup of coffee?" he said, making a sign to the porter.

"No, thank you," replied Michael. That was one thing about Stambul he didn't altogether like—that eternal sipping of muddy coffee.

"Oh, but just one!" insisted the antiquity man. "Why not?"

"I've had one already," answered Michael. "I'm not used to it, you know. It keeps me awake."

The antiquity man smiled a little.

"But not this coffee," he said. "I think you will find that it does not keep you awake."

It began to come over Michael that there was more than the coffee which he didn't like. Was it

the air in that stuffy dark little stone room? Was it the way in which the three men looked at him? Was it that basket of broken tiles?

"No thanks," he said. And he added: "Let's go out where we can see. It's too hot in here, too."

He looked around for the door. He couldn't see it from where he stood. The antiquity man said something, and the porter stood aside. Michael stepped past him, around some big boxes. The door was there. Michael suddenly heard it click; but in front of it a fourth man stood in the shadow. He did not move when Michael stepped forward. He stood there in front of the door, with his hands in his coat pockets. Michael was quite sure he didn't like that.

"*Pardon,*" he said, "I want to go out."

The man shook his head. At a word from the antiquity man, however, he moved aside, keeping his hands in his pockets. Michael reached out for the door. It was locked.

He liked that least of all. He had a sudden impulse to pound the door, the man beside him. Yet the next moment he was ashamed of it. He turned around. The others had come forward, around the boxes—the antiquity man, the big porter with the tray, the old man carrying the candle. In the light of it Michael looked at the other one, the one who had shut the door. He was young and very dark, with a scar across his chin. Michael looked at them all. What in the world had come over them? Could it be that they took that basket of tiles too seriously?

Could it be that they, too, were not what they seemed, that under their first friendliness were black and uncanny things? All the old wives' tales that Westerners hear of the East came vaguely, yet disquietingly, back to him. It was with an effort that he folded his arms and turned to the antiquity man.

"Your methods of doing business," he remarked, "strike me as being rather peculiar."

"It is a peculiar business," said the antiquity man.

"Is it your idea that people should be forced to buy Rhages jars whether they want them or not?"

"The Rhages jar is not for sale," replied the antiquity man.

"O!" exclaimed Michael. "Then what is the matter? What are you after?"

"Not your money," said the antiquity man. "Please believe that, sir. And please believe that we are very sorry. It is—what shall I say?—what we call here *kismet*, fate. If you had not chanced to notice that basket, if you had not taken it down and examined it, nothing would have happened."

"What have I to do with that?" burst out Michael. "Is it my fault if you put baskets where people can see them and then go away? Am I responsible for your carelessness?"

"Your question, sir, is unfortunately most just. But that is a part of the *kismet*—that having been careless ourselves, we are obliged to make you pay for it."

"Well, how am I going to pay?" demanded Michael. "Spend the rest of my life in here?"

The antiquity man hesitated before answering.

"Yes, sir," he said at last, softly. And he added: "Will you have your coffee now?"

Michael could hardly take it in. What did the fellow mean? Then something in the way the antiquity man looked at him made him remember about the coffee—that it would not keep him awake. For the life of him he could not help glancing down at it. How was it that he didn't happen to drink it when they first brought it in? And if he had— He stared at the stuff in its pretty silver holder. Behind it something bright caught a flicker from the candle—a knife in the porter's girdle. Why not? They all carried them. Yet his eye travelled to the pocket of the dark young man by the door. All of a sudden Michael knew as well as if he saw it that there was a revolver in that pocket, and that the young man had his finger on the trigger. Michael's eyes travelled on, up to the eyes of the young man, to the eyes of them all. What strange, glistening, dark eyes they all had, too dark to see into! He found all of a sudden that he felt a little cold. He was even afraid for a moment that he was going to tremble. . .

What really preoccupied him, though, was how the thing had happened. How could such a thing happen so suddenly? It had all been perfectly simple and natural—his work for his firm, his journey abroad, his coming to Constantinople, his prowling

in the Bazaars, his happening to buy a gimcrack of the antiquity man, his introduction to this queer old place, his pawing over those broken tiles. It was all so simple. It would, at any step, have been so easy to avoid. And it was so unjust, it was so fantastically unjust. How could things end as incredibly as that? How could he let them end like that? He was one, and they were four; and they were armed, and he was not. But he wouldn't take it sitting down. The Anglo-Saxon in him stiffened his back and set his teeth. He began looking around stealthily, at the bare stone walls, at the littered floor, for something to get hold of. He would show them yet. . .

"You must not think," said the antiquity man, "that we have no sympathy for your position. But do not think, either, that any—any display of the emotions will help you. No one can possibly hear."

That was the moment when Michael found it hardest to keep his head. If he had been a little younger he probably would not have kept his head. "Display of the emotions"! But he realised at last that for some incomprehensible reason they meant business. He hoped his emotions did not display themselves in his voice.

"Look here," he said. "I see you aren't pick-pockets, and I see that by accident I have discovered something you do not wish known. Well, if you had kept quiet I might never have thought of that basket again. Or I might now try to buy your Rhages jar—for any figure you might name. As it is, I give you

my word of honour that never so long as I live will I breathe a word to any human being. You know me. Don't you believe what I say? But if you don't I will sign my name to any document you care to draw up. If you ever hear of my breaking my word, I am willing to take the consequences."

At this the old man spoke for the first time. Michael could not understand what he said. He did not even recognise the language in which the old man spoke. He had a curiously deep voice. The antiquity man answered incomprehensibly. Then he turned back to Michael:

"I do believe what you say. I do not question your word of honour. But, unfortunately, we cannot take any chances—even the most remote. And impressions, you know, even the strongest of them, like love and grief, have a way of losing their force. Suppose we let you go. There might come very naturally a time when your recollections of this incident would lose their intensity, or when you would regard your promise as less important than you do now. Why not? Life is like that. Life would be intolerable if it were not like that. Things happen, and then other things happen. I have not the honour of any great acquaintance with you, but it is conceivable that you might sometime be offered wine which you could not refuse, or that a beautiful woman might make an impression on you, or that a company of distinguished men might be relating interesting experiences; and before you knew it the

story of this afternoon would slip from you. Or you might dream aloud. You might have a fever. These possibilities, I admit, are very remote, or the probability of any harm resulting to us. Still, you never can tell. Stories have a strange way of travelling. Sometimes they travel from New York to Constantinople. We have known cases. For that reason we —have prepared that cup of coffee. We must secure ourselves against one chance in a thousand."

Michael saw it. He was like that. He had that fatal little flaw of the artist, of being able to see the other side. He saw it then as distinctly as he saw the four dark faces, the candle burning quietly in the dark little room, the dark shapes and shadows of the boxes. He wondered what dark strange thing was hidden here—that meant so much to these men. He wondered about the men themselves, whom he had taken so casually.

"Your life, of course," the antiquity man went on, "is very precious to you. That we perfectly understand. While life is seldom satisfactory, it contains, after all, a great deal for one still as young as you. And one always hopes—often with reason. We ask you to believe that we understand that. We also ask you to believe that no one of us has any personal reason for wishing you harm. We excessively regret the necessity of asking you to drink that cup of coffee. We shall continue all our lives to regret it. Nevertheless, you can perhaps understand that there may be reasons why even your life is of less moment to us

than the possibility of your some day forgetting for an instant the promise you now so sincerely make."

Michael still saw it. He saw, too, what had been growing steadily clearer, that this was an antiquity man among antiquity men. But what he saw best of all, through that portentous candle-light, was a sudden mirage of the summer sun—out of which he had stepped so lightly. He saw it so vividly that his voice had in it a thickness he didn't like:

"I understand. But there are chances and chances. For instance, can a man disappear like that, even in Constantinople, and no questions be asked? When I fail to go back to my hotel, to pay my bill, will they say nothing? When I fail to go back to my country will my friends say nothing? Of course not! There will be a row. It may not be to-morrow, it may not be the next day. I do not pretend to be a person of importance. But sooner or later questions will be asked. And sooner or later you will have to answer some of them. What will you say then?"

"We have thought of that," answered the antiquity man. "We can see that if it is dangerous to let you go from here, it is also dangerous to let others come to look for you here. But by the time they come, they will at least find no baskets of broken tiles." He gave Michael a moment in which to take it in. "If the matter be at last traced to us, it will be a simple one of robbery and murder. For that reason we shall have to keep whatever valuables you

may have. We are very sorry that we shall not be able to send them back to your family."

"My money belongs to my firm, not to my family," protested Michael. "If you keep it, you will take not only my life, but my honour. It certainly will not be to your interest to prevent them from thinking that I have stolen it and run away."

"You are right," replied the antiquity man. "But I do not need to tell you that human actions are usually misunderstood. Even you, perhaps, do not understand that our own motive is not an interested one. There is only One who understands. I may point out to you, however, that we run the risk of suffering from a similar imputation. It will probably be thought that we have killed you for your money. And you must realise that in that case I, perhaps all of us, stand an excellent chance of following you—wherever you go. But that chance we take more willingly than the other."

He said it simply, without gestures, without airs. Michael could not help seeing it and rising to it. He even could not help liking the antiquity man. Evidently it was not a common affair in which he had happened to tangle himself. . .

He saw it, but somehow he felt his sense of reality slipping. He had often wondered, vaguely enough, as one does when the sun is warm about one and the end of life is very far off and incredible, what the end of life would be like—how it could come, whether he would make a fool of himself. But of all the possi-

bilities he had imagined, he had never imagined this little stone room in Stambul, and this candle, and these shadows, and these four inscrutable dark faces of men whom he did not know. Was he making a fool of himself now to say, as he did, thickly:

"Give me your cup of coffee." He tried to clear his throat. "But you might at least tell me first what all this fuss is about. Or are you afraid I shall tell them in the next world?"

He saw a light in the antiquity man's eye. The old man saw it, too. There ensued a conversation between them, in which the young man, his hand still in his pocket, joined. The porter stood statuesque, with his tray of poisoned coffee. Michael, left to himself, began to feel his sense of reality come back.

"Look here," he said, "my coffee is getting cold."

The antiquity man smiled.

"My friend here"—he pointed to the old man—"has made a suggestion. He seems to have taken a fancy to you. In fact I may assure you that we are all pleased at the way you have received the very disagreeable things we have unfortunately had to say to you. Some men, in the circumstances, would have been abject. You might have begged, bribed, wept, fainted, what do I know? We have seen— And we feel sure, as we did not at first, that you did not come here on purpose to find— that basket of tiles."

He narrowed his eyes a little as he looked at Michael, making another of his eloquent pauses. Michael didn't like it, but he couldn't help asking:

"Well, what is your suggestion?"

"Are you willing," asked the antiquity man, slowly, "to change your religion?"

"Change my religion?" echoed Michael, uncomprehendingly. "I'm afraid I haven't much religion to change."

"All the better," returned the antiquity man. "So it is with most people of intelligence. If, however, you were willing to change your religion, if you were also willing to change your language, your name, your home, your wife even, for others as different from them as can be conceived, if you could bring yourself to make that sacrifice and to become one of us, it would not be necessary for you to drink that cup of coffee."

Michael saw it. He caught his breath. But—

"I must ask you to decide quickly," continued the antiquity man. "We all have affairs. And if it should become necessary for us to answer those questions of which you spoke, it would be better for witnesses to be able to say that we were not in here too long this afternoon."

Michael saw that, too. And all the blood in him quickened at the chance of life. Life! His life had not been such a success. Why not wipe the slate clean and start over again? It ironically came to him that Aurora would call that romance—to be

cornered here like a rat in a trap while four men he didn't know stared at him with a candle! But why, on the other hand, should he give in to them? That was cowardice, even if it was irony, too—to die for what he didn't want and didn't believe in. . . The immensity of the dilemma was too much for him. Irresistible force, immovable obstacle—that flashed inconsequently into his head. Was the light going out? The room grew darker. He tried again to clear his throat. It suddenly came to him that he didn't even know who these people were, and what they wanted him to become. . .

The antiquity man reached forward, lifted the coffee-cup out of its silver holder, and dropped it on the stone floor. Michael stared down stupidly at the bits of broken porcelain. They were like the bits of broken tiles. He wondered if his trousers were spattered. . .

The young man took his hand out of his pocket and opened the door.

V

How do I know? I don't. I only know what Michael told me. Which wasn't much. He was like that, you see! Then he was too mortally afraid of its getting back here. He wouldn't open up as little as he did till he heard Aurora had married again! And here you ask who and when and where and why. O Lord! If you would only let a man tell his story and stop when he is through!

However, even you must know that Constantinople enjoys quite a reputation for liveliness, of sorts, and that it was particularly lively just before and just after the German War. It was then that I got out there, as a courier—while the armistice was on. Although it was a good bit after the episode of the coffee cup, I saw quite a number of people who remembered Michael. Of course a good many other people and things had disappeared since his day—including, I suppose, the antiquity man and his bombs. A few Turks or Tartars might have told me something about that, if they lived to tell tales. But of course I had yet to hear about the antiquity man—the interesting part of him, I mean. And witnesses had seen Michael drive away from the *khan* in a closed carriage.

What no witness had seen was the number of the carriage, or the door it drove to. And they told me another yarn about a carriage driving full tilt at dusk into the open draw of the Bridge. I asked myself if poor old Michael were still sitting in it. That version, at any rate, is the one now accepted by Aurora. She has given up her tombstone and her quatrain. She perceives that it isn't every lady who can boast one husband at home among the stars and another sitting in a brougham at the bottom of the Golden Horn.

So I gave Michael up. Perhaps I did it the more easily because there were so many other things to think about: couriering, relieving, reporting—any

number of odd jobs connected with all that mess out there. They took me hither and yon about the Balkans and the Black Sea, on errands that might have sounded quite fantastic before the war plunged thousands of unsuspecting people into adventures a hundred times more so. And one day I landed in Batum.

Everybody who lives in Batum swears it's the dreariest hole on the face of the earth. An English officer I met even sighed piteously to me over the lost delights of Aden! However, I found Batum very amusing, with its higglety-pigglety air of somebody having stirred up a piece of Turkey with a piece of Russia and having turned the mixture out to cool in a corner of the Riviera. To be sure, there are rather too many Georgians and Lazzes and other queer customers prowling around; and the Hôtel de France does too little to live up to its name. Also, that cooling process will evidently take time. But the setting of cloudy white peaks and a misnamed sea is quite worthy of the Riviera. And I must insist that the Boulevard is a really perfect little park. You should see how close the palms and the cypresses march to the white shingle.

Well, I was warming a tin chair in that park one afternoon, watching the operatic crowd, admiring the great wild hills of their Caucasus through their mannered cypresses, listening to the incantation of their Black Sea through their Glinka, and thinking of nothing in particular, when I suddenly made two

discoveries. One was that that Coon song we used to sing about "Lou, Lou, I love you" came out of *Life for the Czar*. The other was that Michael, our vanished reaper and binder, far from having disappeared in the Golden Horn with Aurora's phantom coupé or from having otherwise evaporated, sat solid and sunburned in another tin chair of the Boulevard, eyeing me. To be sure he was moustached, uniformed, medalled, booted, disguised as a kind of bastard Cossack with all manner of strange accoutrements and insignia. But it was Michael. What is more he presently grinned, albeit a trifle sheepishly, pulling up his tin chair beside mine.

"I was afraid you were going to be melodramatic," he said. "As it is, let's have a chat."

We had a chat. Tin chairs in parks always remind me of that chat. At the time I thought it the most interesting chat I ever had. That was before I proposed to Alice.

"I suppose they think I took the money, eh?" Michael finally asked.

"Yes," I answered. "They think you took the money."

"H'm. I've made it up to them without their knowing. So that's all right. And—what about Aurora?"

I told him about Aurora. He was longer with his "H'm" that time. Do you know? I believe the fellow was human enough to be jealous of an astrologer whom he didn't envy! However, he ended by letting out another:

"So that's all right."

"And you?" I ventured.

He didn't say anything at first. He sat there fingering his gewgaws and staring at the sea.

"How's a man to know whether he's all right or all wrong?" he finally demanded.

"Hell!" objected I. "It isn't your fault if you happen to be sitting in Batum instead of in Zerbetta —or at the bottom of the Golden Horn. You couldn't have invented such an end for yourself if you had tried till you were black in the face. That antiquity gang is responsible, not you. But I bet—"

But I concluded not to. As for Michael, he continued to study the afternoon blue of the sea. Down the edge of it a steamer trailed a long dark line of smoke toward the West.

"I suppose I could go back home if I really wanted to," he said, "now that my antiquity man has pulled off his republic. Yet after all, what good would it do? You can see for yourself— The worst of it, though, is that I don't really want to. You get interested in people, you know, in spite of yourself— even when they have Jew noses and jabber Armenian. I'd like to see their show through. Then they've been no end decent to me. I've a vine and fig tree of my own—up Ararat way! I have a house to live in, and a horse to ride, and a wife to beat. I do it, too. I've learned that much," he pronounced darkly, in a tone that struck me at first as irrelevant. On consideration, however, I decided it wasn't.

"Anyhow," he went on, "I'm alive; and I can't say I'm sorry. The funny thing about it is that I never knew it till I came so near stepping off. I've had some pretty narrow squeaks since then, too. And my chances of dropping in my boots are still a lot brighter than yours. All the same, it's better than peddling those damned hay-rakes. But once in a while," the inconsequent devil blurted out, "I come down here and listen to the band."

Now can you imagine a man being like that? But if you ever breathe a word to a living soul—!

HENRIETTA STACKPOLE *REDIVIVA*

THANKS to Henry James—on whom be peace—I am a man without a trade. One by one he used to appropriate my most precious models until I came to await each new book with a curiosity which no disinterested reader could imagine. A surprising number of his so-called creations—how little did he create them only he and I could tell!—I knew long before knowing him. Roderick Hudson, for instance, I met at a villa in the Euganean Hills, and regarded as my peculiar prey, in days before the precipice. And, indeed, he has not gone over it yet; but it is only a question of time. The Princess Casamassima, too, is an old friend of mine who oscillates between Paris and Constantinople. She is shortly to be married, I hear, and that is a turn unkinder than any Mr. James has done me. Then there is Osmond. Often as I have seen him, though, he would probably tell you that he dared say but didn't really recollect. They will never admit that they are fathomable, those people. As for Madame Merle, I believe I have met her once only. Christopher Newman, however, and the Baroness Münster, and Gordon Wright, and poor little Maisie— But I might go on indefinitely, picking out persons of my ac-

quaintance whom Mr. James in some unaccountable way discovered first.

Still, in spite of this purely accidental disadvantage under which I suffer, it must be said that the printed fortunes of these friends of mine afford me, in many cases, a pleasure superior to that of actual intercourse. I have to confess, too, that Mr. James has not seldom lent me the key to mysteries of character which would have remained inscrutable but for his elucidation. It has even happened, furthermore, that an introduction from him has been so complete that when later I came to meet the person in real life it was like being at a play which one has seen before. I knew in advance exactly what to expect.

A cognate case was my encounter with Henrietta Stackpole, the spirited journalist in "The Portrait of a Lady." As I did not recognise her at first sight, it is quite possible that the reader may fail to do so. Indeed, some to whom I tell the story roundly declare they do not believe a word of it. I can only insist that it happened years and years ago, at a far less sophisticated period of our history; that the name on the card was unmistakable; and that Henrietta was a caprice, if you will, but a perfectly credible one, of a rapid and uneven civilisation.

My second introduction to her came about in this wise. I was staying at the time in Venice—a city in which it has been my good fortune to spend much of my life and in which I would count it perfect happiness to spend the whole. A prevalence of rainy

scirocco had for two or three days diminished the enchantments of the summer lagoon. It was therefore natural, on the morning in question, that I should have gone unconsciously to that place which is always aglow when the world is grey, which is always warm when the wind is cold, which is always cool when the sun is hot—the miraculous church of St. Mark's. There I established myself at the base of my favourite pier and proceeded to the familiar enjoyment of sensations which this is not the place to describe.

Presently there crossed my line of vision a lady. This was not in itself a phenomenon so extraordinary. St. Mark's, like other churches, usually contains more women than men; in the course of a year I doubt not that more Americans enter it than Italians; and of American travellers, young women—to use the phrase in its most generous sense—vastly outnumber persons of other descriptions. Indeed, it is a tradition implanted in the European mind only more ineradicably by the doughboys of 1918 that ours is a land of Amazons, whence the few indispensable males are seldom allowed to escape. There crossed my line of vision, then, a damsel of my own nationality. A certain peculiarity attached to her from the fact that she carried no Baedeker. Nor did she appear to have ties with any person or group of persons provided with a copy of that useful work. What particularly attracted my attention to her, however, was a large silver ornament which she bore

on a *revers* of her tailor-made costume. It represented—so far as I could make out—a human head and bust, supported in heraldic and highly decorative manner by fluttering streamers and extended wings. In those distant days there was no cavalry of the clouds, to suggest a winged admirer in the Air Service. So, knowing that my countrywomen are insatiable collectors of the curious and the antique, I wondered if this young lady had picked up in the *Spadaria* some quaint bit of chasing and had adopted this means of transporting it to her hotel.

As if to satisfy my curiosity, the young person obligingly proceeded to seat herself near me on the bench at the foot of the pier. I was thus enabled to devote, at closer range, a covert examination to her treasure. The human representation I accordingly discovered to be that of Col. William Jennings Bryan, as set forth by a legend on the fluttering streamers, which contained further expressions with regard to free silver and crosses of gold. I could not easily decipher them without appearing to transcend the bounds of delicacy.

The completeness of my disillusionment, and the fact that a young and measurably attractive woman should prefer ornaments of free silver to crosses of gold—for which latter I have an especial fancy—led me to consider my companion with more attention than it might perhaps be decorous for a stranger to betray. Her attire was that of a well-to-do person, and she might have passed for one of good taste but

for the ornament to which I have referred. That she was of alert mind was evident from the incisive way in which she looked about and then used her pencil upon a small pad, as one making a sketch. I must confess that I had some curiosity to see how St. Mark's would look to a virgin of political mind, and I was so rude as to let my eye rest for a moment upon her paper. To my surprise I discovered that she was not sketching at all—or that, if she did so, it was with words, and in some dialect to me perfectly unintelligible. The characters with which she rapidly covered her pad resembled those of the Arabic more nearly than anything else with which I was acquainted, unless they had about them something of Scandinavian runes. Altogether I was completely mystified. For whatever traits may distinguish the American girl upon her travels, linguistic facility is not one of them.

As we sat thus in uncommunicative companionship, there approached us that familar genius of St. Mark's, the blue and ancient sacristan who rattles the collection box. Me he knew of old as a wanton gentleman much given to passing half hours in the golden church at the side of young and otherwise unprotected ladies. At least I am sure he can have attributed to me no motive other than that which was likely to bring so many whispering couples of his own nationality. Accordingly he approached us with a smile of recognition and held out toward the person at my side one of those cards with which he

is so inexhaustibly provided, representing the Nicopeian Madonna. The admirer of Colonel Bryan looked dubiously upon this offering. Finally, however, she was won over by the old man's irresistible smile and accepted the papistical emblem. No sooner had she done so than the sacristan, as is his wont, produced the collection box, which from force of habit he had kept behind him. At this the young woman tried to hand back the card. But the old man was occupied in passing the box to me, as in such cases was also his wont. And from force of habit I dropped in a coin. At which the cheerful ancient bent his efforts in other directions.

The girl turned instantly to me, opening at the same time the business-like black leather chatelaine which hung at her side.

"How much was it?" she inquired.

"My dear young lady," I said, "it was nothing at all. I beg of you to put away your purse. Those cards are distributed free. I merely put something in because the old man and I are friends."

She looked at me a moment with some intensity, and then snapped her bag. It occurred to me that her mind would sound like that—when she made it up, as we say.

"How do you and the old man happen to be friends?" she demanded rather abruptly. "Do you live here?"

"Yes" I answered, expressing the will for the deed.

"You speak English very well" she commented,

regarding me much as if I had been a Bearded Lady, or a glove worn by Gustavus Adolphus.

"Thank you!" I exclaimed. "That is a great compliment, for I was born in Vermont."

I suspected that my interlocutress did not altogether appreciate this point. She continued to regard me with such fixedness that I had an immediate intuition of what she was about to say. She would require of me to inform her why I lived abroad when I was privileged to dwell in a country so far superior to every other, and however ingenious might be my pretence she would put me in the wrong. My intuition, however, as too frequently is the case, was mistaken. The young lady opened once more her chatelaine bag, drew forth the receptacle from which she had endeavoured to reimburse my expenditure in her behalf, and produced a neatly printed card which she handed to me. Upon this I read the legend:

Miss Henrietta C. Stackpole

THE OMAHA REVIEWER

I stared at this name in speechless amazement. I had supposed Henrietta long married to Bantling, and by this time the mother of an infinite progeny. And Omaha! But, as I have intimated, much has happened since 1881. And before I could frame some manner of remark, my companion again addressed me:

"I wish you would give me some information."

"I shall be only too delighted, my dear Miss Stackpole!" I assured her effusively. "I have heard so much about you. This is my name"; and I offered her my card in return.

"Where have you heard about me?" she demanded in surprise.

"Why, from Mr. James," I replied.

"Mis-ter James?" she repeated in deep mystification. "I don't remember any Mr. James. Oh, do you mean Mr. Reuben James, of Topeka?"

"No, Mr. Henry James, of London," I told her.

"I don't know any Mr. Henry James," she declared decisively. "He must have seen my letters in the *Reviewer*."

"Oh, of course!" I uttered, with considerable confusion. "I beg your pardon. I thought—— You see—— What information can I give you?"

"Well, would you mind telling me if this is really Venus?" she asked confidentially, sketching a circle in the ambient air.

I regarded my companion with no little uncertainty. What finesses might lurk behind so intriguing a question?

"Ve——?" But even as I began to repeat the name, it flashed into my thick head that so had a gentleman from California once denominated to me some egregious Venice of his native State; and my eyes opened very wide. "Why, yes," I replied, hesitating. "That is, if 'Romeo and Juliet' is Shakespeare. I rather like the water, myself."

While she neither agreed with nor challenged this remark, I observed that it produced a visible satisfaction in her. And she went on:

"I want to find out all about it. There's simply no end of things I want to ask—for my letters, you know. I write for a syndicate as well as for the *Reviewer*, and you're the first person I've met that I can really talk to. I hardly know where to begin. What is this big building next door, for one thing? It's awfully queer looking."

"It is rather queer," I admitted. "The Patriarchate, I suppose you mean? In the *Piazzetta dei Leoncini?*"

"I don't know any names, but I mean the checkerboard one, with piazzas all around and a picket fence along the top."

"Oh!" I ejaculated, staring at her very hard. "That is the Doges' Palace."

"What palace? These I-talian names are too much for me."

"Call it the Ducal Palace, then," I answered, experiencing a profound sensation. The young lady thereupon applied herself anew to her pad; and it dawned upon me that her strange alphabet might be that of stenography. "I should think that you would find a Baedeker convenient," I added, discovering that the intensity of my gaze had drawn Miss Stackpole's eye.

"Oh, I guess I'm bright enough to get around by myself, thank you!" she rejoined with some irony.

"I've travelled enough. This isn't the first time I've been to Europe, either—though it's the first I've been to Italy."

"Oh, indeed! How I envy you! Think of coming to Italy for the first time!"

There was something of voracity in the eagerness with which I turned upon her. This was really too good to be true. It was incomparable. When had anybody ever come to Italy before without knowing exactly what was expected of them? To my astonishment, however, and no small dismay, the eyes of Henrietta suddenly began to swim.

"You wouldn't envy me," she said with a catch in her voice, "if you knew how disappointed I was, and what I've been through."

She turned away a moment, as if to look at the great swinging lamp in the form of a branching cross; but I knew she was brushing her hand across her eyes. An unaccountable contrition swept over me. I responded, as sympathetically as I knew how:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Stackpole! I'm so sorry. I am sure you must have been unfortunate."

"I have been!" she exclaimed, turning to me again. "I——" She stopped short a moment. Then—"You probably think I'm queer, telling you all these things; but you're the first American I've seen for 'most a week."

"The pleasure is mine, I assure you!" I declared. "It is even longer since I have seen one." I failed to add what she might have found complimentary,

that seeing Americans was not what I came to Venice for, and that I usually took pains to avoid them.

"Well," she exclaimed, "it just does me good to talk to you."

"Have you been here long?" I delicately suggested.

"Well, it seems as if it had been forever, but I guess it's only about two days." Miss Stackpole herself was evidently more mysterious than her little pad. In spite of my sympathy for an unfortunate lady I felt again an extreme curiosity to hear the story of an original one. Before I had quite made up my mind, however, as to how I might serve God and Mammon with equal zeal, Miss Stackpole's overburdened heart solved the difficulty. "I've been in London all summer," she volunteered, "reporting the coronation. But I got all het up, and so I broke off and went to Switzerland. I lost big money by it, too. I can afford it, though, and I got a lot better."

"I hope you are feeling quite right now," I interposed.

"So far as my digestion goes, yes, thank you!" she returned. "Well, I was just about ready to go back, when I heard some people in the hotel one night talking about Venice—if that's the way they pronounce it here. They'd left the day before, they said, and they *were* going on, saying how grand it all was. And the more I listened to them the more it seemed as if I must come down here. Somehow I

had no idea it was that near. I've always wanted to see the place ever since I read about it in geography at school. There was a picture of it, and underneath it said: 'Venice, a city of northern Italy, situated upon 117 small islands in the Adriatic Sea.' I thought that was just wonderful—a hundred and seventeen small islands! And I made up my mind then that whenever I got the chance I'd come here. So I started right off the next day. I knew all about the I-talians, though, and I just made up my mind I'd get ahead of them. I wasn't going to land in their country at night, and get robbed or stabbed or something. There was a real nice German in the car, and I found out from him which was the last station in Switzerland and I got out there."

"Oh, my poor lady!" I cried. "You don't mean to say that you spent the night at Chiasso instead of going on to Milan?"

"That's exactly what I did, if that's the way you pronounce it; but I don't believe Italy itself could have been any worse. The hotel was just the limit, and they charged me more than Claridge does—in London, you know. However, I managed to get on to Milan the next day. And I like to have been there yet."

"What was the matter?" I inquired.

"Why, when we had to change cars I couldn't make anybody understand a thing, and they were all so black and horrid and murderous-looking that I 'most wished I'd never tried to come. I was afraid

they hadn't put me in the right car, either; and I hadn't much idea how far it was, and at every station I'd start up and look for the name because I couldn't understand a word the conductor said. But as long as I didn't see those hundred and seventeen small islands I felt pretty sure I was right to stay in the car. Once I almost got out, when we came to some water with mountains all around—as blue as blue! But there didn't seem to be any islands, and we went on and on, and it grew dark, and by and by it began to rain and I didn't know what I should do —everything looked so watery and islandy outside. Then the train stopped and a man opened the door, and when I asked him if 'twas Venus he just took my grip and dumped it out. I was that mad I would have put it right back in. When I got out, though, I saw we were at the end of the line—wherever that might be. So, as it was pretty late to start off anywheres else, I thought I might as well try my luck and find out afterwards whether it was Ve—Venice or not. But I don't believe I ever would, for sure, if I hadn't met you."

"*Beata Vergine!*" I murmured. "Can these things be?" Then aloud: "Why, you seem to have got on very well, Miss Stackpole, for one who didn't know the language."

"Well, I always did manage to find my way around pretty well," she admitted. "But I never had a time like this before. The getting here was bad enough, but after I got here it was worse. I followed

the people out of the station and I looked all around for a hotel 'bus. That's what I always do—get into the slickest one I see, and then I land at a good hotel. But I couldn't find a single one. There were just those queer boats. A good many people seemed to be getting into them, too; but I didn't like to, everything was so dark and the men looked so horrid. I didn't know where to tell them to go, either. Then I saw some more people making for a little steamer, and I almost thought I'd try that. But I hadn't any idea where it might take me, and I thought it was safer to stick to dry land. A whole lot of the dreadfullest men kept saying things to me, though, and tried to grab my grip, and I just about wished I was dead. But I set my teeth and held on hard and said over some things in good United States, and then I began hunting for a decent-looking hotel near by. It seemed as if I was sure to strike some big street if I just walked on perfectly straight. That's what I always do when I get lost. But I couldn't go straight, to begin with. I just kept going round and round in the worst little alleys that landed me up against a stone wall or at the edge of the water or in some creepy place where it was as much as my life was worth to take another step. I got so tired and scared I could have laid right down in the street and cried.

"I'd made up my mind that I'd find a hotel, though, and I did. I finally went up to a man that looked something like a policeman, and I showed him

my bag, and said 'Hotel' real loud, several times. He understood anyway, for he called a man with a brass check on his arm, and said something, and waved me along quite polite. I was pretty scared, because I didn't know but what the man would take me off into one of those creepy places and cut my throat. Nobody would ever find out. I was too done up to mind, though. I just followed along, and by and by we came to a cute little street that wasn't much bigger than the others; but it was real bright, with stores, and lots of people walking, and so we came at last to a hotel. It wasn't a bit like the kind of hotels I go to. I knew this was Italy, though, and you couldn't expect much, and I was that tired I would have slept on an ash heap."

"I wonder what hotel it was," I said.

"It's just near here," replied my companion. "I've got the name on a card, so I can show it to people if I get lost."

She resorted once more to her chatelaine bag and produced a card on which I read the *réclame* of a very grubby little inn occasionally patronised by travellers anxious to practice an extreme economy. The sole recommendation of the place is its antiquity. There is not a window in it, I believe, or, if such conveniences exist, their prospect is of the narrowest and dingiest *calli*.

"They told me it was the oldest and best in town," said Miss Stackpole. "One of them knows a little English."

"Well, it is conveniently located," I assured her. "I hope they have treated you right."

"No!" Her voice died, and this time her eyes flooded so quickly that I saw a splash before she could turn. "You must think me a goose for going on like this," she said, raising her handkerchief. "But it does seem good to find someone who isn't trying to do me out of my bottom dollar." And presently: "How can you live here, among such people?"

The Venetians are with me a very tender point. I have so long been a victim both of their wiles and of their charm! But in the end it is the charm that I remember.

"My poor Miss Stackpole," I replied, "you have been unfortunate. If some of them are pretty bad, so are some people everywhere. And they improve on acquaintance. Still, of course, it is the place that catches one. Don't you delight in it, now that you've seen it?"

Henrietta cast her eyes doubtfully about.

"This church is pretty fine, though they do let it run down the worst way. Just look at the floor! And the square out there—it's queer, but it's nice; especially looking off toward the water. But it isn't a bit what I thought. Those hundred and seventeen small islands now—I sort of saw them lying around in the sea, with palms and temples and things. Don't you know? I never expected these horrid slimy little canals, and backyard alleys instead of

streets, and such awful shiftless tumble-down houses."

I gazed at Henrietta aghast. Then I protested:

"But don't you think many of the little alleys delightful? And the squares, and the palaces, and the carved windows and balconies, and the bridges, and the shine of green below them, and the pictures, and everything?"

Henrietta shook her head sadly.

"I don't know. I haven't been around any, except just about here. I'm afraid. I don't know why. I've never felt that way before. But the little alleys are so treacherous-like, and the people look so horrid, and it has rained all the time, and—oh dear, I just wish I'd never come!"

For a moment I thought that the dikes were down and we were lost. But even as my knees began to knock, Henrietta pulled herself together, dried her eyes for the last time, and said:

"Now I feel a lot better—now that I've told you all about it. Supposing you go ahead and tell me all about things. I'm going to make this trip pay for itself, if it doesn't pay me."

Could Henrietta have read my heart at that moment she might have made a Bantling out of me before I knew what she was up to. The idea of this poor girl so realising the dream of her childhood—of her stumbling blind into the loveliest city in the world, and falling among thieves, and miraculously escaping everything that there was of enchantment

—moved me idiotically. And not only did the pathos of Henrietta move me. I was jealous for the honour of my chosen city, whose peerless charms I have been ready ever to maintain against any champion and all.

"My dear Miss Stackpole," I cried, "you have been unlucky! But you must let me help you to put things right. I shall be your guide, if you don't mind. And first of all you must change your hotel. I know of one which is just the place. Nobody will rob you there, and everybody speaks English, and you will meet any number of Americans, and your windows will open into the Grand Canal."

"What is that?" inquired Henriettá, grasping her pencil.

"*Madre di Dio!*" I gasped. "Why, that is Venice!" This was a banality justified by my companion's predicament. "Haven't you been in a gondola yet? A gondóla?," I emended hastily, detecting a cloud in Henrietta's eye. "One of those boats?"

"No," she answered. "They looked so queer; and then I didn't know as I'd ever get back."

"My dear lady!" I groaned. "This is too much! Come out with me this instant to row in a gondola. You haven't seen the fingernail of Venice yet!"

Henrietta looked at me.

"You're very kind," she said slowly. "I don't know but what I will, later on. Just now, though, I want you to tell me about things. I do want to get those letters done. They are, pretty near." I sup-

pose my face must have betrayed something, for she went on: "Perhaps you think it's funny for me to write letters before I've seen much. But I'm made that way, you know. I really don't need to see a place to tell about it. When I go into it, it sort of comes over me what sort of a place it is, and I just sit down and write it up as if I'd been all over. You might not think so to hear me talk. I'm not much on talking, same as business men who keep stenographers aren't much on writing. But I can write two articles about the same thing, and you'd never guess they were by the same person till you came to the name at the end."

I gazed at Henrietta with deepening interest.

"I hope you will send me your Venetian letters when they come out," I ventured.

"I will," declared she courteously.

She thereupon proceeded to ply me with questions the most diverse, the which for brevity's sake I forbear to transcribe. Each was more amazing than the last, and when finally I found myself escorting her to her hotel, I wondered whether, after all, the rôle of Bantling would suit me. Nevertheless, I had an extreme curiosity to hear her comments upon those aqueous aspects of Venice which had as yet remained concealed from her. I also took occasion to stop at Zanetti's and purchase a copy of Baedeker's "Northern Italy," which I begged of Henrietta to accept as a loan. I knew she would accept it on no other terms, and I assured her that she would find

it invaluable in putting her notes into permanent form. She, thanking me warmly for my manifold kindnesses, declared that she would be delighted to accompany me in a gondola at three o'clock, when her letters would surely be ready for the post.

When I called for her at the time appointed, the porter informed me that the *signorina* had departed on the half-past-two train. In the face of my incredulity he then produced the new Baedeker and the following note:

DEAR FRIEND!

I must beg your pardon for giving you the mitten, especially after you had been so polite. But I finished my letters *much* sooner than I expected, thanks to your book, and after looking same over there really did not seem to be much use in staying on. So, as I have already found Venice *disappointing*, and as I heard there was a train to Paris this afternoon, I decided to avail myself of the opportunity

Thanking you again,

Sincerely,

HENRIETTA C. STACKPOLE.

THE PAGAN

I

I NEVER knew him, myself. That is, in the ordinary way of acquaintance. It was not that I avoided him. It was, rather, that I was young, and shyer than I might have admitted, and too self-conscious on the point of *quid pro quo*. Time has happily made me less squeamish about standing to people in that relation which is not rare in this complicated world, of finding them more interesting than they do me. Even then, though, making people out was for me the chief business of life. Whereas he seemed to live in a world by himself. At any rate he was far more fiercely individual than I, who am Jesuit enough to get on with anybody. Another point, however, was that I went to Marshbury those three times only, for short periods and at long intervals. The wonder was that he had made for me so complete a picture as he did. But I think I never saw anyone else so well through the eyes of others. That is probably why I have never been back. There was something final about that slab of grey granite.

Mary Bennett was my principal source of information. Everyone in the village had his quota to

contribute, for that matter. But as Mary was Marvin's "help," and as I boarded with Mary's mother, I enjoyed exceptional opportunities. Yet now that I say it, I realise how indirectly it is true—how little Mary ever told me in so many words. She was a solid young person of seventeen when I first knew her, really not bad to look at, and much better than gold, but of a—what shall I call it? Indeed, I myself was taken in at first. I used to wonder how much help the girl could be. I was slower then to see how factitious a part speech plays in the economy of life. However, when I heard of the strange being to whom Mary ministered, I prepared to be bored. I expected the conventional ogre of the country village.

How he got that way—to dip into the dictionary of the place—nobody knew. He was born and brought up in the village, like his fathers before him for two hundred years. Moreover most of them had been divines, as the phrase pleasantly goes, and had passed down the thunders of Sinai from one quaking generation to the next. He certainly had enjoyed every advantage. But as for Marvin, he would none of them. It was an insoluble mystery. Mary was the first to suggest that a circumstance of his early youth might be connected with it—and a stepmother. I rather balked at that. I have my own ideas concerning stepmothers. But when I heard about this one—! Marvin had come home from school one afternoon when he was fourteen or so, it seemed, and to his astonishment had found the house

empty. The only thing in it was his little trunk, neatly packed and corded, standing near the door. There was also a note, on the trunk. Reminding him that he was now a man and had a man's part to play in the world, this missive assured him that whom the Lord loved he chastened, urged him to gird up his loins accordingly, and concluded by announcing that, for reasons too sad and too numerous to mention, the time had come for stepmother and stepson to part. That, opined Mary, was in itself sufficient to harden a lad's heart—particularly in view of certain adventures which were known to have succeeded the abandonment. Mrs. Bennett, however, did not countenance her daughter's weakness. "Sary Marvin," contended that matron, "certainly don' her share—pore onfort'nit critter—toward bringin' up Matthew's boy." And the way he had got on in the world ought not only to have vindicated the justice of his stepmother's confidence in him, but to have convinced him beyond all shadow of doubt that the Lord did provide.

Be that as it might, Matthew's boy was certainly provided for. It was but another discredit, however, in the eyes of his contemporaries. To live without toil was as open an invitation to Satan as it was an unseemly example to the community. And, beyond a mere exhibition of sinful pride, it was positively a manner of bearing false witness. For there were many and many that had more than he, and were not above earning their daily bread. To be sure,

there was no infallible means of knowing just how much Matthew's boy had. He who was the opposite of his neighbours in so many respects perversely robbed the local bank of a considerable business, and kept his money in Boston—where it made no difference to anybody. And his cheques were so irregular, and to such varying amounts, that the village financiers had never made up their minds whether Henry Marvin had ten thousand dollars or ten million.

But there were ways, I learned, by which you could tell. For instance, Henry, he didn't take the newspapers and magazines. And everybody that was half-way respectable subscribed to the *Marshbury Messenger*. Henry didn't seem to care much about reading, except a few musty old things of his own that were better left unread, most likely. Nor did he avail himself of the other means of culture which were open to the village. He didn't even patronise the lecture course. Such attractions as they had, too—Dr. Waterman, the great Baptist minister from York State, who lectured on "Oceans of Pearls," so beautifully that you'd never know he was a Baptist; and the Orpheus Male Quartette; and the Ladies' Band, from Germany; and all sorts of things! Altogether Henry didn't spend much that anybody could see, and he probably had less then he'd like to make out, with that proud way of his of doing nothing. And nobody knew, hinted my hostess darkly, how he came by what he had, either.

I am a scandalous gossip myself, and always encourage other people in it. If one may put it without circumlocution, there are few more precious sources of copy. I must say, however, that the Bennetts did not at first profoundly interest me with their revelations. I did not even experience any unusual sensation when I was told of Marvin's prime enormity, that he did not go to church. It was perhaps that in a slightly wider orbit I had happened to hear of such cases before. I had discovered that it by no means argues an original spirit to discontinue that for which one has no inclination. And the mere doing or not doing what everybody else does will rarely suffice to portray a man. The traits of life lie deeper than that. The only thing about it that struck me was that Mrs. Bennett called Marvin, in consequence of his delinquencies, "a perfect pagan." And I put it down in my notebook as another instance of the common use in New England of the most unexpected words.

But I did prick up my ears at last. It was one day when I expressed wonder—a purely conversational wonder, let me confess in passing—that Marvin should continue to live in a community with which he no longer had any tie of blood or sympathy. Mrs. Bennett thereupon informed me that Mary had more than once asked him that very question—so far as I could make out, she enjoyed strangely unconscious terms of familiarity with him—and that he always told her it was because of the brook. He lived, it

seemed, on the farm of his fathers, down near the Poorhouse; and a brook ran through the place, inconveniently cutting off a piece of the orchard just behind the house. The noise of it would drive you silly, said Mrs. Bennett—especially in the spring. It never could make too much noise for Marvin, though. He always made out that there was some girl in it, singing to him.

That brook, and that singing girl, caught me! The rest of it might have belonged to any retiring old gentleman who was afraid of or bored by his neighbours—not that Marvin was so old, though, I came to find out. But this was of a distinguishing quality. And it started me off on trails of curiosity which rather indecently made up for my previous indifference. I would have given a good deal to meet the man. There was no one, however, through whom the thing could be brought about in the ordinary way of the world, and to approach him directly was more than I dared. It was not merely that he was older than I. He suddenly gave me an impression of being more genuine; and I was ashamed to go to him with no better excuse than a summer boarder's inquisitiveness. So I had to content myself with getting at him through other people's versions.

It grew into quite a little game just to make out the deviation of each particular compass, and then to chart the probable course. In the general opinion, I quickly found, Marvin was mad. It was all that

saved him from open persecution. Could a person be regarded as responsible who insisted that he heard voices in running water, and who told the minister to his face that there was more religion in an apple orchard than in a church? And there were things queerer still, intimated Mrs. Bennett. Mary could tell about them.

What Mary could tell, what Mary did tell, most of all what Mary did not tell, would make a story by itself! It was such a case of the unconscious diversity between character and opinions. I gathered that among the reasons why the girl was allowed to serve one so manifestly in league with evil was the hope that her influence might be edifying. Certainly it was for me, during the daily catechisms which she underwent at the hands of her family. These, I was informed in private, were intended to lay bare any incipient work of contamination. Marvin's money was a welcome addition to the family exchequer, but of course it could not be accepted if the girl were coming to any harm. There was special danger, said Mrs. Bennett, that Mary might contract habits of intemperance. Marvin himself drank, and there was no telling but what he would attempt as well the corruption of his handmaid. He was as odd about his drinking as he was about everything else, it seemed. A particular upon which my informant dwelt was that Marvin, instead of patronising the drug-store like those who had legitimate uses for strong waters, obtained his supply from Boston, as

he did his money. But there was something odder still. The man had actually set up a regular bar in his house, in a small entry between the sitting-room and dining-room. He kept it stocked with liquids of strange colours, and he had counters which he could let down across the doorways.

"An' he'll be in the settin'-room," went on Mrs. Bennett, "an' he'll suddenly get up an' say, 'Good-evenin', Jack; can you fix me up a nice dry Martini?' —or somethin' or other like that. Mary's heard him lots o' times. He don't mind her bein' 'round. An' then he'll walk around outside, through the hall, into the dinin'-room, an' so to the other door of the entry. An' he'll say, same as if he was answerin' himself, 'Sure, Cap! I guess we can to-night.' An' then he'll pour out his liquor, an' put it down on the counter, an' walk around outside to the settin'-room again. An' then he'll take up the stuff he left on the counter, and taste it, an' say, 'That's a good one you made me to-night, Jack,' an' he'll drink it up just as if he was in company. He never seems to get real drunk, though, so far as anybody can make out. An' he never tries to make Mary take any. He just tells her he'd agree to do all the drinkin' if she'd only do the mixin' for him, an' that she'd save him a power o' steps if she'd only help him play his game.

"She's don' her best to stop it, but it ain't no use. She just stood up to him one day an' quoted Scriptur'. *Wine is a mocker,* she said; *strong drink is ragin',* said she, *an' whosoever is deceived thereby is*

not wise. An' there's a whole lot more in Proverbs about they that tarry long at the wine, an' look upon it when it is red, an' what not. But Henry, he took her right up. 'Yes,' he pops out, 'an' what else does it say? *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more!*' Did you ever hear the likes of that?"

I had to admit, on the whole, that I never did.

II

It is strange how small a residue will be left by how large a volume of life. Experiences that run through weeks and months can be summed up at last in an epigram. Not that I am one, let me say in passing, who is given to that form of expression. The thing done has for me no such interest as the thing doing—to dip again into that dictionary. Yet the rest of my summer in Marshbury added very little to the picture which I have begun to sketch. I had had my impression. I merely spent my time turning it over, taking it in. And the most curious thing was that, savouring the impression as much as I did, I could go away and think no more about it. I went away, and I stayed away three years. The attractions of Italy for the time outweighed all others. But after my "beaker full of the warm South," I had a whim to go back to Marshbury. To speak in homely terms, I suppose it was on the same

principle that one likes a cold shower after a hot scrub. At any rate, I am never so fond of the North as after a prolonged sojourn in the South, or of America as after Europe. And the picture of my pagan came to me again more strikingly than ever—that picture which would have been so impossible in the country from which I returned, which was so of the soil of that to which I went back. To Marshbury, therefore, I proceeded; and, of course, for old times' sake, I put up at Mrs. Bennett's. Indeed I could not put up anywhere else. They were all so a part of the impression.

As for that, however—! I was not in the least prepared for the changes it had undergone. I must even confess that I was at first a little disappointed. I somehow felt that Marshbury had not honourably kept its tryst with me. So does one insist on opposing one's childish singleness of idea to the richness of life! The background, to be sure, was exactly as I remembered it. The hills looked just as they had from the time of the Flood. So, I felt certain, did the houses and the people. By whom I mean the lay figures, the supernumeraries. And Mrs. Bennett herself, who was no supernumerary, was good enough to spare a shock to my sensibilities. But that only made Mary seem the more unnatural. She had suffered one of those metamorphoses to which the young are so peculiarly susceptible—and which, apparently, no amount of experience can ever teach their absent elders to foresee. The curious thing

about it was that I could trace, after the event, how impossible it would have been for her to turn out otherwise. Even through her solidest days she had always been prettier than she could help. It was only natural that she should have grown up into a handsome dignity that barely fell short of beauty and stateliness. And while she was little freer of words than she ever had been, she no longer gave one the feeling that she stood in want of them. Altogether she distinctly left me staring.

And she by no means put an end to it when, in response to my inquiry as to whether she still went to Mr. Marvin's, she replied:

"Yes. He's got a girl now. He says she's the one who used to sing to him in the brook."

This statement surprised but did not enlighten me. I did not know whether to understand that the Pagan employed a maid or was somehow in possession of a daughter. It appeared, however, that the latter was the case. And it furthermore appeared—at least to my subliminal consciousness—that in Mary a tacit forbearance with her master's failings, as being more of the head than of the heart, was less unquestioning than it had been. It may have been that I saw more than there was. I generally do. At any rate, when it occurred to me to ask whether Marvin still kept up his bar, I certainly touched something. I could see it in the way Mary told me that everything had changed since the girl came. I felt for her. I felt, that is, as if some bungler had

got hold of my rather original little sketch and had finished it off in the conventional old fashion.

Marvin had a child. That was the bare fact. But the full story I did not get then. Nor, for that matter, do I suppose I ever shall. I did pick up one thing and another, though, and the result of my pickings I shall now attempt to set forth. It will take less time if I do it in my own way. Particularly as I have no love for the dialect in which my information came to me. If Truth lie within that pale, let me forever go without!

The affair must have caused a good deal of scandal at the time. Marshbury took even less pride in the possession of a Potter's Field than in its lack of tenants. And when a strange woman turned up from somewhere, and had the ill grace to die in the Poorhouse, people felt that their good intentions had been imposed upon. Although they did grant that it was the best thing the woman had ever done. . . . But the worst of it was that a shock-headed little girl of nine or ten was left on the Overseers' hands—a small imp into whom her mother's devil had returned with seven wickeder than himself. It took no time at all for the matron of the Poorhouse to shake her head and sigh: "Blood will tell!" Indeed, she openly expressed surprise that the Most High in his mercy had neglected to take the child unto himself at the same time as the mother. It certainly would have saved Mrs. Lovejoy an infinity of trouble. The mischief that child was not up to! She was as un-

manageable as quicksilver. Her worst trick though, was running away; and she had a passion for playing in the brook of which no amount of whipping could cure her. Time and again the countryside was beaten by night, the brook dragged from one end to the other, only to have her turn up safe and sound and very hungry, without any idea where she had been or what anxiety she had caused. Nothing ever happened to her, either. It was so notorious that Mrs. Lovejoy would often have been glad to let her go, just to have the child off her mind.

It did not take this inquiring young lady long to discover Marvin. Two causes operated powerfully toward that effect. The first of them was that she had been warned against him, as being the nearest and most dangerous of her neighbours. The second was that her brook ran through his orchard. Accordingly she waded singing upon him one day as he sat with his book under an apple-tree.

"Well!" he exclaimed, as the childish voice suddenly stopped and he looked up to find a bare-legged little apparition holding scant skirts in both hands above the water. "Who are you?"

"I'm Sassy," she answered, taking him in with big black eyes. "That ain't my real name, though. The old woman says it ain't Christian. My real name's Daphne."

"Well, well!" ejaculated Marvin. "Mary!" he called to that young woman, who happened to be out at the pump, "here's the naiad of the brook come to

pay me a visit!" And to the child, who balanced herself on a smooth stone while she splashed an overhanging branch with her foot: "What old woman is that?"

"Mis' Lovejoy," answered she of the unruly hair.

"Lovejoy," repeated Marvin. "Love-Joy. That's a nice name." He was a little at a loss for something to say. "Is she your mother?"

"Huh!" cried the child. "It may be a nice name, but it's all that's nice about her. She's just as horrid as she can be. I hate her. She ain't my mother a bit. It 'most seems as if I never had any." And she began to visit upon the water a series of spiteful kicks that spattered even Marvin's page.

"Oh!" said he.

The two then looked at each other for a minute. But it was the child who spoke first.

"What do you do?"

"What do I do?" queried Marvin, puzzled. "I don't do much of anything that I know of."

"I mean what do you do that's bad?" promptly returned the child. "They told me I mustn't ever speak to you, because you're bad. I'm bad too. That's why I came."

"Oh!" laughed Marvin. "Supposing you tell me what *you* do."

"Lots of things—tear my clothes, and muddy my shoes, and sit in the grass, and climb trees, and slap, and kick, and run away whenever I get a chance.

Most of all, though, I play in the brook. Are you as bad as that?"

Marvin held out his hand.

"Just about!" he told her. "But don't run away from here yet a while, Daphne—or turn into a laurel. We have too many things to talk about, you and I."

So it was that Daphne and the Pagan first cemented the bonds of friendship. In the eyes of the unappreciative community that harboured them, however, it was but another point against them both. If Marvin had known what pangs his small ally was compelled to endure in his behalf, he would long before have done what he did. For, as Mrs. Lovejoy had ever been one to live up to her word, Daphne spent an increasing portion of her days in cupboards. She likewise became an expert on the elastic properties of different domestic woods, and subsisted chiefly on bread and water. But when not otherwise engaged she spent all her time at Marvin's, to the despair and dismay of all in authority above her. "Birds of a feather!" they ominously whispered. Until at last things got too serious for whispers, and Mrs. Lovejoy took matters into her own hands.

It must have been quite a scene. The rumour of it still filled Marshbury at the time of my second visit. Mary Bennett had been washing windows in the kitchen, and I got the most authentic details. It seemed that Mrs. Lovejoy swooped down like the wolf on the fold, one afternoon when Daphne was missing, and discovered the two, as she expected, in

earnest colloquy. She did not wait for preliminaries. I must say I rather admire it, too—that trait which will seek the point at any cost, without fear or favour.

"I don't know what you find in that child," she said to Marvin—"born of a common woman of the street that's buried in the Potter's Field, and as full of Satan as an onion is of smell! But when we're trying to do our best for her, it seems too bad that you should come along with your heathenish notions and just undo everything. I'll thank you to keep them to yourself. Sassy, you come along with me."

"I won't!" declared the child, roundly. And she ran for refuge into Marvin's arms.

Well, she stayed there. Of course there was a tremendous row. Mrs. Lovejoy stormed, and Daphne cried, and Marvin manœuvred rather helplessly between. And the upshot of it was that Mrs. Lovejoy retired ignominiously from the field, leaving her adversary the somewhat astonished possessor of an infant. Not that his title was uncontested. Mrs. Lovejoy's last word had been that she would put the matter before the Overseers, and she did. If she was a harsh woman, she was, according to her lights, a just one. She did what she thought best in circumstances which she was not subtle enough to understand. Sassy was an intolerable incubus to her, but for the good of Sassy's immortal soul she thought the waif should be saved from Marvin. After much parleying, however, it was concluded to let the child stay. She had been given her chance. The com-

munity had done its duty. And its representative, in the person of Mrs. Lovejoy, realised that, after all, there was a limit to the endurance of flesh and blood. It would therefore perhaps be allowable to let the orphan go into hands that were ready to care for her. The community promised itself that, under this provision for the material aspect of the case, it would keep a watchful eye on the child's moral welfare.

I am not sure that the community did not envy for Marvin a little moral discipline in the contract which he so unexpectedly undertook. Certainly there were distinct elements of humour in the situation. To drop an incorrigible youngster into the arms of a man who knew no more about children than he did about the fourth dimension, and who had risen in the morning without the faintest notion of adopting one, might suggest very dubious results. But the brilliant success of the experiment only served to let in a little light on the ignorance of bachelors and the incorrigibility of waifs. The pair entered upon a life which became no less amazing to themselves than to the community at large. People could not imagine where the two discovered the secrets of virtue and good humour with which they suddenly blossomed forth. It amounted to another proof of their innate perversity.

At all events, for the first time in many days both of them were happy. They paddled unmolested in their brook. They invented solemn mysteries about

their relation to it. They climbed their apple-trees. They dug their garden. They kept house—without a bar. They told stories. They explored the country-side for leagues around. Altogether they used to make me wish, when I came to meet them on the hills, that I could be a pagan too.

III

That opportunity, however, did not come to me. The same train of circumstances which forced me to leave Marshbury sooner than I expected kept me away from it for the next seven or eight years. But even though the impression which I have been recording had lost a little of its early piquancy in becoming more human, there was something about that quiet corner of New England which always stayed with me. In crowded streets I thought of its open valley. Through the chatter of drawing rooms I heard its running water. Among people sophisticated to the vanishing point I remembered Mrs. Bennett and Mary.

So, when the propitious moment arrived, I went back to them. There was, I fear, a touch of the practical even in my sentiment. I had started to scribble a New England novel and I wanted to be quiet. I therefore thought to kill the most birds with one stone by returning to Marshbury. Be that as it may, when I drove in toward the town it was with an unaffected thrill that I suddenly recognised the old feeling of the river road. I scarcely

know how to express it. There are indefinable states of emotion, as distinct in their quality as odours or colours. And only the surroundings which awakened them first can, if ever, awaken them again. This, I suppose, is the ground of that principle of conservatism in man which can never reconcile itself with the flux of the world.

My last visit ought to have prepared me for changes. The drive, however, upset the inner counsels with which I had fortified myself—and Mrs. Bennett. She, immortal woman, was identically the same being whom I had known eleven years earlier. Even Mary had not changed so much between twenty and twenty-eight as she had between seventeen and twenty—although it was curious to me that the effect of time should be so much more visible in the one better able to resist it! The strong colour of her girlhood had softened into that delicate bloom which few but nuns can wear. And there was something about her eyes that intrigued me. But I did not wonder long. I had other sensations to take account of. For in my ointment of happiness at getting back I suddenly discovered a very large and buzzing fly.

Not that the Reverend James Wentworth could precisely be compared to that humble creature. I had come, though, to look upon the Bennetts as my private property, upon their paradise as open to myself alone. And to find it invaded by the new minister put my nose distinctly out of joint. Particular-

ly as I perceived that my hostess fancied herself and me greatly honoured by such fellowship. Of course I could not be nasty about it. In other circumstances, in fact, I might have appreciated it as much as anybody. For I have an odd sympathy for young clergymen. Without knowing very well how much they deserve it, I always look upon them as among the few really romantic people of the world—the people who follow an inner light, regardless of rival luminaries. But the Reverend James, alas, was of those who carry the theory to its logical conclusion. He was inalienably assured that his own inner light was the sole reflection of Truth, and that all men else—with whom he happened to differ—pursued false fires.

It was a tremendous disillusionment, this unexpected change of *milieu*. I had two ideas of leaving on the spot. The new atmosphere, charged with latent argument, was the medium in which I breathe least easily. Being, however, more or less of a Jesuit, as I have intimated, I merely fumed within—and took copious notes. I promised myself that the Reverend James should one day affront a wider audience in the panoply of fiction. It was doubtless a lame enough compromise. I have always envied those single temperaments that can identify themselves with one side of a cause. For myself, I am unable to do it. I suppose I do not take things seriously enough, or people. They come to me as cases rather than as questions. I have no sense of responsibility

about them. At any rate, the case of the Reverend James I proceeded to accept as an element of my Marshbury impression. Little did I foresee how sharply it was to throw into relief the other case with which I had so long been occupied!

That had evidently grown more crucial with the years—Marvin's case. For Daphne was dead. She had been dead almost four years, it seemed. And in circumstances— One could not expect anything but scandal where such people were concerned, Mrs. Bennett told me. The only decent thing about it was that she and the child had died together. Anybody might have known that she would go wrong. It was what she was born to. She had done it before one could turn around, and just for a good-for-nothing young scamp she hardly had time to get acquainted with. Old Marvin, however, had refused to turn his face from her. He had only kept her the more carefully, and had been inconsolable since. Mary had never known him so queer. But—

Yes, it was evident that there was a "but." There were things of another, a darker, kind: things which were not so easy to put into words. Between Mary's eyes and her mother's mysterious shrugs it was much as ever that I succeeded in getting at what the business was about. If it had not been for the plain-spoken Mr. Wentworth—! There was a strangeness to the thing, though, when I got it. There was a strangeness which I never dreamed eleven years before. It was only the stranger for the apparently

conventional touches which my impression had in the meantime received. But as I write of it I realise Mrs. Bennett's difficulty in speaking to me. It was not a thing that you could say in so many words and then go out of the room. You had to know the place, the people, the circumstances. It was so largely an effect of relativities, and of relativities different for each person whom they touched.

It all began with Daphne's death. Then Marvin, who for seven years had been as much like other people as he could be, said Mrs. Bennett, suddenly turned more eccentric than ever. He refused to let the girl be buried like a Christian, in the cemetery. Of course she wasn't one; but it was queer that he should be the first to say so. He said the place for her was between him and the water, and he made them dig a grave in his own orchard—on a sort of little mound there was beside the brook. If it had been anybody else, the Selectmen would have stopped him. But seeing it was that girl—! And instead of getting her a proper tombstone, which he could well afford and which everybody supposed he would do, considering the store he set by her, he just planted on her grave a sprig of lambkill.

That was natural enough in a way, opined Mrs. Bennett. People like to put flowers on graves. But lambkill! Laurel, he called it. He said that was Daphne's tree. It was all a part of some heathenish business they had had between them. Mary thought he got it out of his books. Anyway, he spent all his

time taking care of it. Of course it's right to keep graves looking tidy. But you don't build little greenhouses over the flowers in winter. Neither do you get up in thunder-storms, in the middle of the night, to go out and attend to them. If the Lord intends things to be taken care of, he takes care of them, in spite of thunder-storms.

The strangest part of it, though, was something more unnatural still—something almost supernatural. The laurel sprig had followed for a time the ordinary course of cuttings; had by sheer force of tenderness been kept alive, and had at last developed into a healthy little plant that could live alone. But then of a sudden it received a new and secret impulse. It began to grow as no laurel had ever grown before. There was nothing like it in the whole country. It outdistanced at a bound the humble shrubs from which it sprang, and bade fair to rival even the great mountain laurel of the woods. And such flowers as it bore—such deep and burning clusters as never would have passed for cousins, even, to the faint-flushed wax of the lambkill!

The thing was unnatural enough in itself, Heaven knew. But Marvin made it a scandal. It hardly needed Mrs. Bennett to make it plain. He insisted that Daphne had turned into a laurel, after all. He called the bush by her name. He spent all his time listening to the growing whisper of its leaves. He said the strangest things to Mary about it—things stranger than any he had told her in the days when

he used to say that there was a girl singing to him in the brook. A cult so extraordinary was not one to pass unnoticed. Even if Mr. Wentworth had not been in the village to formulate the moral issues of the case, the miraculous laurel waved there on its mound, more indecently conspicuous every day to those who passed on the road. An uneasiness spread among them. It was a reproach to Church and State alike that such things should go on in their midst. It corrupted youth and was an offence to age. Something should be done.

Mr. Wentworth, accordingly, did it. He, like Mrs. Lovejoy of old, went straight to Marvin. And again I could not help admiring the simplicity of that attack. I almost wished, too, that I might have been present at the encounter. It must have been such a contrast of types as one does not often witness in this half-way world. But it was not difficult to gather what happened. It was wonderful how little Mary said, and how much she expressed! Almost as wonderful were the volubility, the excitement, with which Wentworth came back from his interview.

"He is an enemy of God!" cried the minister. "He professes to believe in God; but 'he that is not with me is against me.' He has faith neither in heaven nor hell. He denies the sacredness of Scripture. He says a soul is nothing but a word—that there is as much soul in a ruby or a rose as there is in himself! And the kind of immortality he looks

forward to is worse than none. He is a perfect pagan!"

The table rang with it for days. Of course it was Mary who supplied the necessary additions to the story. Incidentally, albeit unconsciously, she likewise supplied additions to her own story of which I had begun to feel a certain lack. Marvin had received his caller courteously, it seemed; had even consented, with a new quietness that had come upon him, to listen to Wentworth's exhortations. But the poor zealous young man finally lost his head and allowed himself to say that they both knew where Daphne had gone, and it wasn't heaven either. Well, the minister departed rather suddenly, and Marvin went out to his laurel tree.

With all this going on at the table, I found it hard to keep up my Jesuitism. I was more than ever caught by the case of this pagan who was the legitimate child of a New England village. It was such a strange example of the protean perversity of things to melt into one another. Then the poetry of it simply undid me. I sat there smugly writing New England novels, but I could never have imagined anything like this. And the trains it started off—! Had that little tree indeed despoiled the secrets of the grave? Had some taproot, blindly groping through the dark soil, become a channel whereby was made manifest the alchemy of the earth? Was the laurel literally a transfiguration? Might it be proof of the infinite resource of life that that unhappy

heart which life had broken should at once forget its pain and dishonour and be transmuted into beauty?

To me more than ever the wind and the waters spoke mysteriously. For me more than ever was there a kinship between crystal and plant and creature transcending the jealous immortality of man. There was neither superiority nor inferiority. It was all part of the unceasing life of the earth—of that deathless ebb and flow which draws the ancient elements again and again into new combinations, which always has wrought with the same ones and always must, in changing forms of beauty and wonder.

And I came the nearest ever to seeking Marvin's acquaintance. He made me think of what Pater says of Leonardo, who "seemed to those about him as one listening to a voice silent for other men." I was interested to the verge of indiscretion. I even went so far, I must confess, as to walk oftener than elsewhere on the Poorhouse road—whence could be seen the sacred laurel above its little stream. It was indeed a prodigy. Such blossoms I never saw in my life. It turned one's head to see them there, aflame among their glossy green, with the brook skirling below. Mary told me that Marvin would never pick them. Indeed he never picked any flowers now, she said. It began the spring after Daphne died, when the trailing arbutus came out. She had brought him some, one day, thinking to please him. But he asked her not to do it again. It

hurt them, he said. And they were Daphne's cousins, the arbutus. . .

I do not know how far I might have gone. But there came a day when all hope of acquaintance was suddenly cut off. There came a day! I shall never forget it. I had been on a long walk in the country. My book was stuck, and I knew of old that the only way to unstick a book is to let it alone. So I walked miles and miles in one of those delicious New England afternoons of early summer when the air is an elixir of eternity. It made me think of the Pagan and it quickened in me a growing sense that the earth existed as a whole and endured as a whole; that men were but one phase of its immense secret energy whose so-called consciousness had unbalanced them a little, was merely another mode of an energy more astounding still, as light and heat are but two modes of vibrations which possess others undreamed. It was for this reason, perhaps, that I came home by the Poorhouse road.

As I rounded the turn by the orchard I looked as usual toward the laurel tree. To my surprise, I saw figures moving on the mound; and there was a cart tied at the gate. It was so out of the ordinary that I stopped in spite of myself. Then I suddenly discovered that the laurel was gone! I could not believe my eyes. The thing was too inconceivable. It was to me as if I had stumbled upon a scene of murder. In the first horror of it, in the certainty that something terrible had happened, I forgot my habit of

taking no personal part in that village drama. My unuttered feeling for Marvin caught me like a hand and led me, choking, toward the mound.

All I had eyes for at first was the laurel. It lay inert on the ground, that a few hours before had waved so royally aloft; and already the magic flowers looked a little wilted in their green. Beside it crouched Marvin. He said nothing; but the inarticulate sounds that came from him were the most piteous I ever heard. And the way he caressed his stricken beauty was more than one could bear to see. No lover could more tenderly, more passionately, address the limbs of his dead. He straightened out contorted twigs. He lifted petals from their contact with the ground. Now and again he put his hand to the poor sawn trunk, whence a little pale moisture was oozing, as if to stanch a mortal flow. And all the while he kept by him the severed knot of the root, with its one thick stem that had been broken off deep in the ground.

After the first instant the indecency of looking at such a spectacle overwhelmed me. I turned away. I noticed Mary then for the first time. Two men whom I recognised as farm-hands of the Bennetts were also there, and another whom I did not know. And Wentworth. Wentworth! All the shock of the moment suddenly flared into my long latent dislike of the man.

"Are you responsible for this?" I almost shouted at him.

I could have killed him, and he knew it. Yet that certainty of right and wrong which is the power of his type did not desert him. I had a sub-conscious appreciation of it, so keen is my accursed sense of such things, even in my fury.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "I am!" Oh, he was not afraid or ashamed! He was of the stuff that has kindled fires and fed them since the world began. And he went on as if he had been in his pulpit—or at the stake: "I have wished that this parish should administer both rebuke and reparation. I have long regretted that heathen rites should be tolerated in a Christian community—as also that a proper charity should not be shown to all, irrespective of creed. I therefore took steps, after asking counsel of God, to attain both ends. I cut down this tree because it was a public scandal, an occasion of stumbling to Christians and sinners alike. The very children of our village were beginning to be infected by its heresy. And I shall adorn the house of God with these spoils, thus to expiate a sin and to consecrate anew a work of God which has been devoted to unholy uses. But I have not wished to be hasty in the matter, to be needlessly harsh and wounding. Furthermore, it has been my desire to make good a neglect which has rested too long on the Christian conscience of this community. I have accordingly taken steps to mark with fitness the last resting-place of an unfortunate young woman who apparently from her birth was more sinned against than sinning."

He pointed behind him. Where the laurel had been I saw now a slab of grey granite. And cut into it I read these words:

DAPHNE MARVIN

1894–1911

"He that is without sin among you,
let him first cast a stone at her."

WHITE BOMBAZINE

I

AND, like all serious patrons of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, we devoted our last afternoon to the Spring Academy. Of course it turned out to be as academysh as ever, and the medals had as usual gone to people who deserved them less than I. We therefore amused ourselves by playing our favourite Academy game. The Academy game consists in stalking haughtily by the obvious pictures, eyes averted and noses on high, and in darting with delight upon some forlorn hope, worrying over it until everybody else comes to stare—when you silently steal away. The success of this game, I must admit, depends largely upon Nick. For he has inches, hath Nick, and an air that overalls cannot bottle up.

We had thus decoyed the multitude from the first Hallgarten picture to a skied futurism that nobody could make head or tail of, and were casting eagle eyes about for our next pounce, when what should I spy but the familiar signature of Zephine Stumpf! I was feeling silly anyway, and the sudden recollection of Zephine was too much for me. I collapsed on to a sofa.

"What is it?" asked Nick, ready for the coming pounce.

I could only wag my head hysterically and wave at the wall in front of us. It was enough for Nick, however, who always had superhuman intelligence and a catalogue.

"What is loose mit Zephine?" demanded he.

Nothing was loose with Zephine—except her painting, as it ought to be. Her picture, as a matter of fact, was very decent—some children, sketchily but becomingly dressed in splashes of sunlight, in an orchard. Zephine had been painting pink infants in sunshiny orchards ever since I first knew her in darkest Greenwich Village—when she could get hold of the orchard or the infant—and this was quite the best of the lot. But I could only gibber like an imbecile and wipe my streaming eyes.

Nick gave me up as a bad job. He proceeded to examine the picture. He looked at it from one side, he looked at it from the other side, he poked his nose into it to see how it was painted, he cocked his eye at it from across the room. Finally he came back to me.

"You can have delirium tremens till you're black in the face, if you choose," he announced, "but I like Zephine. I'm going to buy her."

"I wish you would," I managed to hiccough. "She deserves it."

"But why do you go on about her like a demented cockatoo?"

"It's only her—her clothes!" I snorted, going off again.

Nick went off too—to the Secretary's office. And he presently returned, brandishing a receipt at me.

"There now! She's mine and I shall stand up for her!" he exclaimed. "Why, species of a beast, do you make fun of a sister brush's clothes?"

"I don't make fun of them," I retorted. "I always admired them very much. Only——" I had to stuff my handkerchief into my mouth lest my inept cachinnations profane anew the decorous shades of the National Academy of Design.

"Only what, animal?" pursued Nick severely.

"They were so—so original!" I gasped.

"Original? How can anyone's clothes be original?" inquired Nick. "I have tried all my life to invent original clothes, and never achieved anything more original than when I was young enough to induce a scandalised tailor to sew blue serge with green thread."

"Well, hers were," I insisted. "And do you have the courage to tell me, Nick Marler, that you never saw them—or heard of them?"

Nick signified that such was the case. And at the thought of what lay before me I was near erupting again. But Nick held me to sanity with a cold grey eye.

"I suppose she wasn't very well off," I began. "None of us were, of course. And I suppose she must have had some German philosophy in her sys-

tem. Her people came from Halle. So she set about solving the problem of dress. She said no woman could begin to dress who hadn't at least ten thousand a year to do it on. For other women, then, the only thing was a sort of uniform—like postmen, or peasants. She really would have liked the costume of Thuringian village girls, she said, but was afraid it might be too conspicuous for New York. She therefore evolved a uniform of her own—always the same thing for the same time of day."

"Very sensible, too," put in Nick.

"The real beauty of it, though, was its compactness. She only kept three or four things going, and they were all"—I caught my breath—"reversible."

"Reversible! How do you mean reversible?"

"How do I mean reversible? I mean reversible. I remember a certain brown skirt in which I oftenest saw her. When Zephine went to a party, Nicholas, what did Zephine do? Zephine turned her brown skirt inside out, Nicholas, and then it suffered a sea-change to a pea-green rich and strange, Nicholas, with brown leather bindings and big silver buttons —for *Schönheit's* sake."

The madness began to flicker again within me. But Nick, out of the perversity of his heart, refused me the shadow of a smile.

"What else had Zephine?" queried he.

"What else had Zephine?" echoed I, nettled at Nick's gravity. "Let me see. Zephine had else a

creation of écru silk, which in conjunction with the pea-green skirt and the leather bindings and the silver buttons completed her effect of splendour for varnishing days and studio teas. But minus the pea-green skirt it might be a morning dress, or a painting apron, or a dust cloak, or—who knows, Nicholas?—perchance a robe of night."

Nick looked at me and I looked at Nick.

"Do I shock you, my Nicholas? Nicholas mine, be not shocked. You know the morals of Greenwich Village, how milk-mild they are, as compared to its scarlet conversation. And Zephine never made any bones about the secrets of her toilet. She had, for instance, a——No, Nick; I cannot pronounce it. You gaze at me too solemnly, and we are surrounded by too many of what you would call the best people in New York. Very likely you're right. It is not given me to read their hearts. But it is given me to inform you that Zephine also had a shiny grey skirt of state, of super-state, which by means of unimaginable buttonings, hookings, loopings, and heaven knows what, transformed itself at will into a blouse or an opera cloak. And she had only one hat, which in summer was a sailor and in winter a sort of Turk's turban. The other girls said she was always urging them to go and do likewise."

I giggled to myself at the remembrance of it. But as for Nick, he obstinately continued to frown upon me like a Spanish inquisitor.

"Look here," he pronounced at last. "I don't

know whether you're drawing on the recollections of an extremely lurid past, or whether you're being visited by the divine afflatus. But it strikes me that you're more amused than anyone else. It also strikes me that this is a pretty sleazy line of stuff for one man to pull or another to listen to."

With which Zephine dropped abruptly from our conversation.

II

Having done his duty by the arts and crafts of his country, Nick was suddenly moved, on that eve of his departure, to go miles uptown—to Washington Bridge. He has rather an eye, Nick. I had forgotten how the tall arches of High Bridge stand up against the bright water and smoking gold of a Harlem sunset. It was better than the Academy, if I do so say who am a slave of the brush. And it inspired us to pick up a dinner somewhere in the neighbourhood.

I don't know whether it was because the place was German or whether it was that the proprietor produced for Nick such a Moselle as you didn't come across every day even in that faraway year. But as we sipped the last of it and debated how we might worthily spend our last evening on our native shore, Nick casually proposed:

"Let's go and see Zephine."

I am not usually the one to lag behind. But Nick had refused, with opprobrious implications, to play

with me, and it seemed good to me to refuse to play with Nick.

"Come on, Herb," he persisted. "Don't be a spotted zebra. Let's go find Zephine." And he called for the bill.

"How on earth do you propose to find Zephine at this time of day—and we sailing for Norway at ten to-morrow morning?"

"Where do you think I was born—Island Pond?" inquired Nick suavely. "There's a telephone book in front of your nose, and a directory beside it. In addition to which I might remind you that her address was in the catalogue."

"What was it?" I asked. I knew in my reluctant soul that if Nick had made up his mind there was no use sulking.

"O, Corlear's Hook some place," answered Nick, charming the heart of an anxious-looking waiter—if the heart may be charmed by that which is put into the hand.

"Corlear's Hook!" I exclaimed. "She's moved then, though it sounds enough like Zephine. But it's some way from Washington Bridge."

Nick didn't mind, however. Neither the taxi man who presently undertook to jounce us from one end of Manhattan Island to the other. And I am happy to add that we ran over no one on the way, though we did run out of gasoline. Incidentally Nick soothed my ruffled feelings by making me tell him about Zephine all over again. I fancied, though, it

was really the Corlear's Hook that caught him. He made me promise that I would say nothing to Zephine about the picture.

At Corlear's Hook there was no Zephine. It wasn't that she was dining out, or anything so simple as that. She had gone up to paint at Fort Lee, in a farmhouse whose whereabouts the janitor endeavoured to make plain to us in the accent of Warsaw. To Fort Lee we accordingly proceeded, to the vast delight of the taxi man. Luckily it was a moonlight night, or we never would have succeeded in tracking Zephine to her farmhouse. As it was, we nearly tumbled off the Palisades a dozen times.

I have no idea what time of night it was when we finally floundered through an orchard to Zephine's dark and silent lair. I bet Nick she wouldn't be in it. Nick bet me she would. She was—fast asleep in bed. But we routed her out, and she parleyed with us through a window while we kicked our heels on the edge of the piazza. It was rather like the third act of "Faust"—except that Zephine was a contralto. She had a pleasant gurgle in her voice that I had forgotten. She also had the proper yellow braid over her shoulder, if not two of them. And the whole place was operatic with apple blossoms and moonlight.

Many ladies might have betrayed a certain surprise at receiving a visit at an unknown hour of the night, in a New Jersey orchard, from a New York taxicab and two men of whom they had never seen

one before in their life. Not so Zephine. She accepted it as perfectly natural that I, who had not seen her for longer than either of us could remember, should feel irresistibly impelled to bid her farewell before sailing for Norway, and that Nick, whose name she had apparently never heard, should pay this somewhat unusual tribute to a lady whose work he had happened to admire.

In token of his admiration Nick invited her to join us in a little drive—at this I heard a snicker from the direction of the taxi—and help us pick up an ice on the way. Zephine judicially considered the matter, stroking one of her Marguerite's braids, but eventually opined that she would better not. She had models coming at sunrise, and she couldn't paint if she were sleepy.

"O!" sighed Nick in evident disappointment. "Couldn't you put your models off? What I really hoped was that you would get a little acquainted with us, or with me, and consent to go to Norway too."

That was what I heard Nick Marler say, in Zephine's moonlit orchard, swinging his long legs off her rickety little piazza! And I listened for her answer with my mouth open. For I knew she was perfectly capable of taking Nick at his word. Her deep gurgle, however, reassured me.

"That is awfully nice of you, Mr. Marler. If I had sold my picture in the Academy, I might. But as it is, I'm afraid Norway is not for me."

"O, I didn't mean that!" cried Nick, secretly giving me an infernal pinch of reminder. "I do hope you won't think me rude, or anything like that. But Herb here is going as my guest, to give me his expert opinion on some old enamels we have an idea of hunting up, and we'd be ever so pleased if you'd be good enough to come along too and make one of the jury."

III

She went!

Reader, whom I feel it unworthy to cajole by the use of any epithet so simple or so designing as gentle, —reader, I who went too, I who heard, who saw, and who now narrate, do not profess to have the charcoal sketch of a notion how we really embarked on our fantastic adventure. I therefore feel somewhat hopeless of communicating it to you, or of convincing you that you have not unwittingly been seduced into starting a story unfit for ladylike or gentlemanly ears. To charge it to the account of the Moselle, however, is what I refuse. I can only propound the thesis that the geography of "this goodly promontory," the unstable planet whereon we spin, has as yet been imperfectly mapped out. I am unable, at all events, to accept the popular theory that its surface is divided between the World and the Half World. Even you, epithetless reader, have heard of a tract lying between the two, and overlapping them both, vaguely designated as Bohemia. But my own mild explorations have convinced me that Bo-

hemia is a name not comprehensive enough for a certain dark intervening continent of which are denizens my very good friends Nick and Zephine. And I hereby invite you, if not to comprehend their case, at least in a spirit of tolerance to consider the same.

Do not expect me, therefore, to fill up valuable space by assuring you in so many words of Zephine's epic simplicity, or of Nick's romantic freedom to do whatever came into his head. He told me afterward that when he saw our friend and her braids and the apple blossoms and everything, he just had to find out whether I had been lying about her; and if she hadn't agreed to go with us he would have cancelled our passage.

As a matter of fact, he did. Not many hours after our return from Fort Lee he sent me off by myself to get Zephine. "And by the way" he added, just as I was starting, "come to the Cunard pier."

"What pier?" demanded I in astonishment.

"The Cunard," he repeated. "We shall get over quicker by the *Pactolia*. And it may amuse Zephine more."

I, who am of the submerged tenth, had been dying to cross by the latest flier. But Nick, who won't—or who wouldn't—have a yacht because it's duller and less comfortable, has a passion for discovering boats that nobody ever heard of, by which queer people take forever to get to out of the way ports. He had therefore engaged passage on a line that

sails to Christiania—when it doesn't hit some outlying portion of Scotland and go down with all on board. It was on the tip of my conventional tongue to object that we were too late to get anything by the Cunard or any other line than our own, three hours before the ship was to sail, in the migrating season. I have travelled with Nick before, however. He is not like me, credulous enough to believe steamer agents and hotel clerks and sleeping car men when they solemnly swear they haven't a berth left. He always insists, on some dark theory that what they really prefer is not to sell out, that they've got something up their sleeve. And heaven has gifted him with the art of getting it down.

And so it was on this memorable occasion. Zephine and I arrived at the foot of Fourteenth Street at three minutes to ten, purple and panting but still on speaking terms. For I had all but abducted her. At the decisive moment I had discovered in this emancipated lady a scruple. She was calmly painting in the orchard, and before she would dismiss the sunrise models, or pack her straw suitcase, it became necessary for me to prove to her that Nick could take the entire Academy of Design to Norway every summer, if he chose, and still have enough left for enamels. However, we were hustled by that gentleman aboard the *Pactolia* just as the gang-plank went up. Zephine and her straw suit-case were installed in an ivory-and-gold royal suite which had until the last moment been reserved for a Cattle Queen

of the South-West, her retinue, and her wardrobe trunks. But the Cattle Queen had been so imprudent as to indulge in an excess of Nesselrode pudding, plus Crême d'Yvette, during the fated hours that Nick and I were taxying around New York and New Jersey. We contented ourselves with the captain's cabin—Nick vowing they had another somewhere and would cough it up as soon as they started. Which, in fact, they did. But as Nick wouldn't let me take it, and I couldn't let Nick, I suppose the captain must have slept there instead of in the steamer chair with which Zephine's sympathetic imagination endowed him.

I have been lucky enough to cross the ocean as often as most people, and oftener than some; but I never made a voyage like that. The howls with which I had greeted Zephine's reappearance on my horizon were constantly upsetting my equilibrium. While I have enough in common with her and Nick to travel in their company even to this day, I also have too much in common with Mrs. Grundy not to be conscious how horrified she would be when it came out, through the pronunciation of names and the confidences of stewardesses, that the lady of the royal suite was not the famous Cattle Queen of the sailing list but a simple damsel of the brush, voyaging under the protection of the far from obscure Mr. Nicholas Marler. Such cases, of course, are not absolutely unknown on ocean greyhounds. The beauty of this case was its perfect difference from anything

good Mrs. Grundy was capable of conceiving. And what a picture-play I could make out of it if I had the time!

Zephine's clothes were naturally what interested the more inquiring of our fellow passengers. Yet the glances which followed our companion were not, I noted, of disdain. I concluded that the royal suite of the *Pactolia* lent Zephine's uniform a new value, or at any rate gave her a freedom to wear what she chose. For she was good enough to justify my account of her. Having marked out a sartorial course for herself, Zephine had never wasted time in reconsideration. She duly produced the brown skirt, or the pea-green, or the shiny grey, as occasion demanded. And each was a pure delight to Nick, who couldn't get over her. But he had had the flair to know, which I hadn't, that Zephine would not suffer by comparison with the laces and jewels of the saloon. It surprised me, in that company, to discover what an air she had. She had been through the mill of the studios, of course, and it would take a good deal to startle her. In fact she sometimes startled more delicately nurtured dames by the things she took for granted. She was not Marguerite, though. She was nearer Juno, in her large, fair, easy, Germanic way. Her braids were magnificent in the light. As for her throat and her shoulder, they were incomparable.

"Really Nick," I burst out one night, "you are a born connoisseur. Did you know, or were you mad

—just seeing her like that, in a window, for a quarter of an hour, in the moonlight?"

Nick's rejoinder, which was no reply, edified me to the limit of edification.

"She says they wash," he seriously observed.

My jaw dropped, for only to the wise is a word sufficient. But then I howled anew.

"Of course they wash, you cracked walnut! That's the killing part of it, because she doesn't save anything by her famous system—she has to keep so many of them going."

"Why didn't you ever marry her?" continued Nick inconsequently.

"I never thought of it, for one thing. Neither did she, for another. If she had, she scarcely would have failed to mention it. And neither of us could afford it, for a third. Want any more reasons? I can think them up as fast as you can ask them."

"Herb, you're an ass," commented Nick without forms. "But it's never too late to mend. We'll build a Norwegian cottage in the lake orchard at Island Pond, and you can both paint apple trees and live happily ever after."

"Thanks," said I.

IV

It was great fun showing Norway to Zephine. They went very well together. Norway is the least conventional of countries, where you have the most room in which to swing cats. There is nothing to

look at but Norway itself, and you aren't overrun by fellow bearers of the red book. It doesn't distress me a bit that the mountains are only half as high as the Swiss ones. They are twice as effective when they climb sheer out of still green fiords. That is the great point about Norway, of course—the water, and those fingers of the sea feeling for leagues among the mountains. And the peasants are quite the most perfect among peasants, if a shade too honest.

Zephine was entranced by everything, from our first view of the Christiania Fiord. That's too much like Island Pond to suit me. However, disdaining trains, boats, and the outcries of the Grand Hotel, we embarked in three of those funny little carts, drawn by three of those fat friendly little ponies, and travelled post—when we could—across to the Hardanger Fiord. When we could not, we walked. We nearly froze to death, too, in the high fjelds, just as the Grand Hotel had promised with tears in its eyes. But Zephine and I made no end of sketches, and Nick got no end of ideas for cottages—with arches of rough stone, and outside stairs, and loggias of carved wood, and roofs overgrown by turf and pansies and bluebells. We also picked up, out of such cottages, some old silver that made our eyes pop out of our heads. Altogether we had the time of our lives.

We hardly saw a tourist the whole way. Consequently we were surprised enough to drive into Odde one evening, at the head of the fiord, and be

told there was not a room in the hotel. We might have expected it, for the time was just when people flock to the North Cape. And there was no other hotel in the place—which then consisted of two or three cottages and a pier. Nick, however, took his usual course with the landlady. He blandly persisted in demanding three rooms, until the landlady produced them. Very good rooms they were, too—or at least mine was. It looked out through festoons of blossoming honeysuckle into a little garden, and beside it a river ran gaily into the long avenue of the fiord, whose rocky walls were still gilded by the late summer light. As I stood there, looking and listening and sniffing, an old lady stepped from a wing of the house to make a last touch of local colour with her wonderful white cap, which stood out frilled and starched around her head like an aureole.

Still more wonderful, in his way, was a man whose acquaintance we struck up at dinner. He was an Angle, though he might have been a Saxon. He was all pockets, and he travelled with everything he had in the world in them. You never saw such bunches in such unexpected places. Some of the pockets were too inaccessible for him to get at without taking off his clothes; so he had bags inside of them, detachable by means of tagged strings which hung within reach. He showed us some of the things in the bags —rocks and weeds and beasts of the field. For the man was by way of being a naturalist. And his back was so stiff and so flat that you couldn't conceive

what was the matter with him, until you learned that somewhere in it he kept a life-sized atlas!

"Nick," I observed after a hilarious evening, as we stood in my window looking at the twilight of the gods that hung in the fiord, "a crown of righteousness shall be laid up for you on high. You have made Zephine's fortune."

"O?" he grunted noncommittally.

"That Englishman! I see it all. They were formed by heaven for one another. It's a case of *coup de foudre*, as the alienists say. We shall have to go home without Zephine."

"Herb," remarked Nick, turning his back on the twilight of the gods and on me, "your inside is as baroque as that bird's outside. Stop being a pickled peacock, if you can, and go to sleep."

It was not written, however, that slumber should instantly visit our eyelids. We presently became aware of a tremendous commotion downstairs. We then became aware of the cause of the commotion. The commotion was caused, as no one in the house could help learning in the broken and squeaky English of its fount and origin, by no less a personage than His Serene Highness the Prince Ernst Paul XXIII of Waldeck-Hohenkugel, who had reserved, as it appeared, the very rooms which Nick had pulled out of the landlady's sleeve, and who clamoured that those rooms be delivered up to him at once. The landlady, good woman, had made her bed and she lay in it. She refused at all events to turn us out of

ours, arguing that no reservation held after dinner. And she liberally offered his far from serene Highness his choice of bath rooms, billiard rooms, reading rooms, drawing rooms, or dining rooms. His Highness rejected them all, very profanely, and vowed he would go on to the next post-station. But as there happened to be no road to it except by water, and as no steamer would leave till morning, he was forced to accept what hospitality the landlady proffered him. So silence descended at last upon the solitudes of Odde.

V

When I unwillingly came back to consciousness I thought His Serene Highness must be getting under way again. Then I didn't know what to think. For who should be at my chaste bachelor bedside, shaking me vigorously and shouting something about Nick, but Zephine. It didn't take me long, however, to make out a strong smell of smoke, a most unpleasant glare, and horrid sounds of crackling. What happened next I don't quite remember. We only just had time to run for it. You have no idea how quickly a small wooden hotel can burn up at two or three o'clock of a cool June morning. There turned out, thank heaven, to be no casualties. But there were some pretty tight squeezes. And nobody saved much of anything.

As the flames died down and the survivors began to regard each other in the cold light of day, we pre-

sented one of the most inspiriting spectacles I ever hope to admire. It made me think of what I have heard described in rural regions as a white shower. The only completely dressed persons in the party were a few sympathetic citizens of Odde, plus my old lady in the white cap and the Englishman of the pockets. A fairly complete exhibition of the night-wear of civilisation was there, hovering for warmth in the neighbourhood of the smoking ruins or lurking for privacy in an orchard I had not noticed the evening before. There were a few blankets and counterpanes in the assembly. Some had clutched odd garments as they fled, and now retired behind apple trees to put them on. One lady had had time to rescue her hat—"only this and nothing more." A squire of two dames had clothed one of them in his dinner-jacket and the other in the waistcoat appertaining thereto. He himself boasted a pair of pumps and a Baedeker. As for me, I discovered myself to be the happy possessor of a pair of trousers and a travelling rug. The latter in particular was highly comforting, in the air that drew down the valley from the white fjelds.

I likewise discovered, however, that with the rest of my belongings I seemed to have lost my companions. I had been so diverted, for a time, that it did not occur to me to be uneasy about them. And I was unable to imagine that two such competent persons would ever allow themselves to be roasted alive. I began, though, to wonder what had become

of them—when in the wearer of a splendid Persian dressing gown I suddenly recognised Nick. We fell, so to speak, upon each other's necks.

"But where is Zephine?" we simultaneously demanded.

She could scarcely have come to any harm, for she it was who rescued us both. And we both vaguely remembered having, in our excitement, seen her afterward. But where on earth was she? And, poor wretch, in what condition?

Just as we were setting forth to find out, we were arrested by a loud and lamentable *"Ach Gott!"* This outcry enabled us, indirectly, to identify the Prince of Waldeck-Hohenkugel. I had first picked out for that nobleman the most distinguished looking person present, a blond and curly-haired Apollo who stalked about with an air of proprietorship, classically draped in a sheet. But a squeaky voice, issuing in response to the *"Ach Gott!"* from an unnaturally distended suit of purple pyjamas, rebuked my ingenuousness. His Highness, less serene than ever and now past all power of English, nevertheless took us at once into his confidence, pouring out the history of his woes from the moment of his arrival in Odde, and intimating that the fire was a just judgment from on high upon an unrighteous *Wirthin*. As for the princely consort, she shivered in the lee of an apple tree and refused to be comforted. She had reason!

I looked at Nick and Nick looked at me. We had not much more cause for happiness than those dis-

illusioned pleasure seekers. Nor had we burned the roof over their heads. Yet we had, as it were, snatched the pillows from under them. Moreover we could not help being conscious that our own case was less dire than theirs, and that one of them was a lady. So Nick, like a hero, took off his Persian dressing gown. I, not to be outdone, divested myself of my English travelling rug. As one man we advanced toward the princely apple tree, whose branching trunk intervened between us and the shrinking Serenity of Waldeck-Hohenkugel. And each of us, holding out at arm's length his offering, invited Her Highness, in a strange mixture of tongues, to accept the same.

Her Serene Highness—such is the inconsistency of womankind—eyed us through the fork of her apple tree with no little confusion. In the candle-light of her ancestral halls, or even in the sunlight of the beach at Swinemünde, she would have been unconscious of exposures more expansive than she now presented. But to parley, under a Norwegian apple tree, in a single voluminous garment of white, with two honourably intentioned gentlemen in pyjamas, seemed to shake the serenity even of a mediatised house. Yet that Her Highness's emotions were of a complex nature was patent from the hungry glances which she cast, now upon the English travelling rug, now upon the Persian dressing gown.

I know not how long this painful scene might have been drawn out, had it not been for Zephine, our lost

Zephine, who suddenly reappeared before us, trim and miraculous in her famous écru silk and her famous brown skirt, with the Englishman of the pockets. Behind them marched the curly-haired Apollo in the sheet, respectfully bearing Zephine's straw suit-case. It was really too much.

"Well Zephine," I was just able to remark, well-nigh overcome by my superhuman attempts to ward off another attack of hysteria, "this is a scene to your taste. Here is an orchard and here are models—more or less as you like them. I think we would make you a stupendous success in the next Academy!"

Zephine, taking in the situation at a glance, wasted no time in unprofitable speech. She made a sign to the Englishman of the pockets, who for a wonder understood it. At least he forthwith presented to our little company his atlas façade. She made another sign to the gentleman in the sheet, who put down her suit-case, pulled his uncombed yellow forelock, and stalked away. She then, under the admiring eyes of her travelling companions and of Their Serene Highnesses of Hohenkugel, proceeded to open the suit-case, revealing her palette, her little folding easel, and the rest of her painting paraphernalia.

"Gracious!" I burst out. "Are you going to do it? Or are you going to paint clothes on us?" And at the same instant Nick demanded: "Who's your friend?"

Zephine evidently considered the latter question more worthy of a reply.

"He's the stable boy of the hotel," she said, "and he's been helping me telephone. I've engaged rooms for us all in Bergen. And the captain of the steamer says we can go on board any time we like. They're making coffee for us there. Keep your clothes, for I've saved mine and can lend some to this lady." As a matter of fact, there they were, under her painting kit! "But first turn your backs and hold this behind you, so that we can have a dressing room." And she handed us a green silk petticoat.

It is not for me to record what took place behind that petticoat. I can only testify that it was upon a much more serene Highness we were at last permitted to turn—attired in Zephine's shiny grey skirt of super-state, with other necessary adjuncts, and abounding in the most complicated expressions of gratitude.

"*Kolossal!*" let out the Prince. "But I—!" he added mournfully, beating his brilliant breast.

"You can wrap this around your shoulders," said Zephine comfortingly, presenting him with the green silk petticoat. "And you might give him something, Herb," she added. "You seem to have more than you need."

"Ah!" archly exclaimed Her Serene Highness. "Then he is the one! I asked myself which of these gentlemen was the gracious lady's husband."

The violence of my efforts to maintain a decorum suitable to the occasion must have made me turn a colour not far from that of the princely pyjamas. I

hardly dared meet the eyes of my accomplices. Yet when I did so it was to discover in Zephine not quite the amused self-possession I expected.

As for Nick, he stared a little, he drew himself up in his Persian dressing gown, he did his best to click a pair of bare heels, he made Their Serene Highnesses of Waldeck-Hohenkugel such a bow as they knew how to appreciate, and he said:

"Pardon, Highness, but you are mistaken." Then he turned, somewhat less ceremoniously, to me. "Look here," he threw out, in a way that made me stare in turn. "I don't know how much the mantua-makers of Bergen are up to, but Zephine'll have to get some new clothes, like the rest of us. She's given away most of her own. And I think it's about time she tried a new system. Anyhow, the first thing she's going to have is one non-reversible garment of white bombazine, garnished with mosquito netting and whatever in the flora of the country may answer to orange blossoms. Do you get me?"

I signified, not without a grin of surprise, that I got him.

"I suppose you imagine that I owe you something," proceeded Nick, "and so I won't ask you to listen to any remarks on the subject of a habit you have latterly developed of snickering at inopportune moments. I will ask you, though, if you don't mind, to go to Trondhjem and look up those enamels. I'm afraid Bode may be after them. In the meantime I think Zephine and I will beat it to the North Cape.

I shouldn't wonder if we ran around to Archangel and Nova Zembla too. I'm going to telegraph to England for a yacht. So you can take your time. But you must be ready for us to pick you up on our way back."

At first, you know, I thought they had cooked the thing up between them. But Nick's air—rather of a horse with the bit in his teeth—and Zephine's unmistakable pinkness, and a queer look they at last exchanged, when Nick finished his speech and offered Zephine his arm, told me that not until that moment, when two Serene Highnesses, a baroque Englishman, and I, were staring at them, had those extraordinary young persons come to the point of undertaking the delicate negotiations vulgarly known as getting engaged. Zephine, at any rate, did not refuse Nick's offered arm. And with a somewhat less magnificent bow they strolled away, leaving me to deal with the situation as best I might.

I did take my time. I bagged the enamels, and then I went on a two months' walking tour with the Englishman of the pockets.

UNTO THE DAY

I

MARTIN leaned across the dusty parapet, ridden by that singular depression which one may know in strange cities. The fervour of the August sun, giving an intolerable vividness of outline and detail to the curving perspective, did not serve to cozen his mood. The ragged gully of the Arno, sunken between the ordered stone embankments, the wider curve of parallel façades with their indefinable touch of dignity and age, the dainty miniature of Santa Maria della Spina, the crenelated pile of the old citadel behind the *Ponte a Mare*, gave him the sense of something known and wearied of long ago. He looked down as from an infinite height upon a group of boys shouting below. They were splashing in a shallow pool or chasing each other naked on the sands, with an abandon enviable alike for its disregard of nature and of man. Beyond, where a rivulet of the shrunken stream made some pretence of motion, a row of women knelt above their washboards. They beat their hapless linen with a vehemence which at such a temperature would have been preternatural had their chatter not made it miraculous. The theatrical vivacity of the people, their

unaccustomed faces, their foreign speech, weighed again on Martin's humour. He rose impatiently and turned his back to the river.

The quay was hardly more engaging in the pitiless morning glare. White pavement and stucco façades danced together in the quivering silence. Scarcely a living creature was visible. A man passed with a panier-laden donkey, uttering a harsh unintelligible cry. The straw hat on the beast's head, through which two long ears protruded comically, provided a fleeting object of interest. In the distance a woman approached. She was dressed in white, and Martin felt a personal resentment against her for not affording some contrast to the intolerable monotony of light. Had she come forth in sky-blue or bottle-green, she would have been a public benefactress, worthy the freedom of the city.

Wondering miserably what he should do with himself, Martin cast an indifferent glance at the building in front of him. It was one of the high dark-browed Tuscan *palazzi,* broad eaved and strong-barred like the great houses of Florence. The entrance was open, giving a glimpse of a shady courtyard within. Above the massive archway was a device that attracted the young man's attention. A fragment of chain hung there, from a bolt projecting above the key-stone; and between the chain and a high stone escutcheon ran the legend, in letters of tarnished brass let into the weathered marble:

ALLA GIORNATA

Martin's interest was caught. The three links of chain, the heraldic lion, the enigmatic inscription—what did they signify? He studied the open gate, the marble benches beside it, the forbidding windows, the iron torch-sconces, as if for a clue. As he did so the sound of steps intruded lightly upon his survey. Glancing about he remarked the offensive person in white. He noted, furthermore, that her offence extended to and included her shoes, but not her hair—which was dark; that she twirled a white parasol over her shoulder in the most obvious and irritating satisfaction; and that her eyes were upon him, with an expression which closely resembled amusement. At his look she turned them to the palace gate.

A moment later his resumed inspection of the writing in the stone was interrupted by the transit of the parasol. Something of the butterfly assurance with which that cloud of lace and chiffon blotted out the dusty inscription prompted Martin to wonder whether it had a secret which was denied himself. From a sudden whimsical impulse he demanded aloud:

"What does it mean?"

To his intense astonishment and no small dismay the parasol slowly turned, revealing a pair of eyes which no longer dissembled amusement. Yet it was not the parasol nor the eyes, but the owner of them who answered:

"It means everything. It means the whole of life."

Then the parasol resumed its rotatory orbit up the *Lungarno Regio.*

Martin stared after it, not knowing whether to be more astounded at his own temerity or at the sound of his native tongue. But everything in him cried out against the solitude of that sun-smitten quay; and he called, desperately:

"Thank you, but I wish you would be a little more explicit—considering that I have been after that formula a good many years, and don't happen to have my phrase-book about me."

The parasol hesitated, came gradually to a stand-still, and once more performed an axial revolution of forty-five degrees. This time—had Martin not been too eager to perceive it—the amusement in the eyes was mingled with curiosity:

"They don't put it in phrase-books. People have to translate it for themselves."

"But I don't know Italian!" protested Martin, hastily, taking off his hat: "*Giornata*—Is it like *journée?* The day? That which happens between dark and dark?"

The lady still faced the river, looking back at him over her shoulder:

"Yes."

"And the chain!" pursued Martin: "Is it a whole chain or a broken one?"

"That depends!"

"'To the day'—and a chain! Why is that the whole of life?"

"Why is it not the whole of life?"

"Because it's only a part. And it's not the best part: the part that gets things done, the part that one likes to remember."

The parasol eddied lightly in the scorching sun:

"You have been reading phrase-books too much. That is exactly what it is: the best part, the part that gets things done—if things ever are done—the only part that one likes to remember. The rest is merely padding."

"But that chops things up so!" objected Martin, polemically: "And it makes too much of the chain."

"O! I beg your pardon," responded the lady bowing slightly: "I thought it was information you wanted." She turned a little toward the *Ponte di Mezzo*.

"I suppose you are right," admitted Martin precipitately, "in a way. But would you really have people live just for the day?" As he stood there with his back against the baking stone of the parapet, his head uncovered to the sun, he became aware that the point of his interest had somehow shifted from the writing above the gate to its interpreter with the parasol. She was not so young, he observed, but neither—on the other hand—was she so old. He felt that he would gladly suffer a sunstroke if he could succeed in prolonging the interpretation.

The lady laughed outright:

"They do! I'm not responsible for it! But what have you against me? An inoffensive person walks

down the street, at peace with all the world, when she is suddenly waylaid by a defiant young man whom she has never seen and is forced into the heat of argument—as if the sun were not bad enough already!"

Martin laughed too, albeit not so lightly, for he perceived that the interpretation was at an end:

"I beg pardon for waylaying you. I can only offer you my word that it is not my habit to go about distressing and destroying all ladies, like Sir Breuse Saunce Pitie. I suppose I fancied myself the sole person cognizant of the English language in this town, which I have never seen and which I already hate."

To his relief the lady did not take instant departure, but laughed again:

"If it comes to apologies we shall be quits. I can only beg you to believe that it is not my habit to stop and chaffer with strange gentlemen. I suppose it was the novelty of your attack that undid me. If you had begun with so harmless a remark as 'Good morning' I would have known you at once for an objectionable character; but since you immediately engaged me in the ultimate problems of existence you surprised me out of my conventions!"

"I will offer you any reparation in my power—even to the point of a card!" eagerly rejoined Martin, who detected signs of unrest in the parasol.

"I will not exact that proof of you," said the lady: "Names are necessary in complex societies only—of

three or more." Although she said it lightly, she said it in a way that made Martin put back his card-case and hastily button his coat. "But you mustn't hate Pisa," she went on: "There are charming river curves in it, and narrow streets with overhanging eaves. And, if you don't mind my mentioning things which are so ordinary as to be starred by Baedeker, I know a cloister in a quiet corner of the city wall where the Middle Ages are buried. Or I could even show you the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them from the top of a tower."

"I wish you would!" burst out Martin, before he knew what he was about. The next instant, remembering the card-case, he damned himself.

But after looking across her shoulder at him for a moment she gave her parasol a jerk of decision.

"I will!" she smiled, facing him at last: "Now that I have hopelessly compromised myself it is too late to assume a forgotten dignity and sweep away with an outraged stare! Why should I not practise what I preach? *Alla giornata!* I was just wondering what to do with this long hot morning. And do put your hat on. I am already smouldering, even under my parasol."

II

They crossed the quay to a dark little alley that skirted the flank of his palace, and Martin could scarcely realise how it was that his mood had so completely changed.

"Be warned in time!" he said: "It is not too late to repent. I don't want to lure you away under false pretences. I'm just a common tripper and I have a Baedeker in my pocket."

"I knew it!" she rejoined: "That is why I am throwing my reputation to the winds. And I hope you notice, in the meantime, that we are entering the Way of Wisdom. See?" she pointed to the name of the street—*Via della Sapienza*—cut in a high stone. "But I always wanted to know what trippers did. Do tell me!" She put down her parasol as they entered the cool of the shadow. Martin was glad, for it enabled him to see her better.

"Must I be butchered to make a Pisan holiday?" he asked. "Know then that I, who now tread the Way of Wisdom, started out on a poetical pilgrimage. I have been walking—figuratively, and a trifle anachronously—in the footsteps of Shelley. Rome knows me; also Venice, Ravenna, and the Euganean Hills. I have been to Spezia. I have pensively treadled bicycles up and down behind every villa at San Terenzo, wondering which was the one. I have sailed boats on the Seno di Lerici. I have gone swimming at Viareggio. I have haunted the harbour of Leghorn. And early this morning I wheeled up here. I am now prepared to make a brief but comprehensive survey of the city and environs—particularly of the *pineta* at Bocca d'Arno. There I shall compose a sonnet, sitting with my back against a sea-viewing pine, and then I shall

go home. The anatomy of tripping is laid bare before you!"

The lady laughed.

"I wish I could boast as good a reason for being here! It is the dentist that brings me." Martin noticed that she did not say from where. "But I am afraid I have thrown away my reputation for nothing. You have not yet explained the hordes that pour through this country with their red books in their hands, as regular as the birds in their seasons. Why do they do it, do you suppose? They make no poetical pilgrimages. Have they no lives of their own to live?"

"You are rather hard on us!" laughed Martin. They turned out of their alley, a mere crack between the houses with a strip of blue hung high above, into a cross street that led to a small square. "It is very simple. No American woman is quite happy until she has a motor car and has been to Europe. And then there is Culture, with a large C, which is making terrific inroads among us. And there is—*'Kennst Du das Land'*— You know? Not many of us are so lucky as to stay, like you in the different colonies." He looked at her to see how his guess would catch.

"I remember I had ideas about them once" she said, in a tone that made Martin wonder "But I know them too well now."

"What about them?"

"They have most of the characteristics of Botany Bay at its flourishing period. There are a few work-

ers and loafers; but most of us are hiders, sitting more or less modestly under smaller or larger clouds! Don't ask me which I am!" she laughed, as Martin looked at her. "I used to think that disreputable people would be more interesting than reputable ones," she went on, "because they had at least the courage of their convictions. But I have discovered to my sorrow that they can be just as dull as anybody. Of course there are glittering exceptions. But I have even met people of the most unquestionable virtue who were really worth knowing! I have come to the sad conclusion that existing classifications do not classify."

Martin laughed with her as they went up the wider street into which their crossway had led them. But the interest which her very first word had aroused grew stronger in him than amusement. This dainty white person whom he had never seen before to-day—who was she? Where had she been, what had she done, yesterday, all the other days that went before their chance meeting by the Arno? There was something in the lightness of her words, in the simplicity with which she had accompanied him, that was not of common days.

The street opened out in front of them into a space of sun that widened as they advanced, disclosing the famous *piazza* with its group of white buildings under the city wall.

"Isn't it nice?" she asked. "They always remind me of a little convoy of ships becalmed—these lonely

white things with their broad shadows in the sunlight. But don't look at that tower. I detest it for having tried in such a stupid way to be different from all the towers in the world. Nothing is nice about it but the view from the top. Which it is too hot to get at now. Let's go over to the Campo Santo and look at the shadows of the tracery on the pavement. It is always cool and quaint there."

She raised her parasol and led obliquely across the great square, between the cathedral and the baptistery, to a canopied door in a low wall. Martin stared curiously about him as they went. The burnt grass between the hot flagstones gave a strange impression of the solitude of the place, of its evident separation from the life of the city, which contrasted singularly with the splendours setting it apart among the shrines of the world. They rang at the canopied door and were admitted. It was like stepping into another century—so calm, so cool, so of itself was that burial place of another age. Of a different quality was the very sunshine which gilded the green of the quadrangle and retraced on the pavement of the cloister the outlines of the marble lace-work between the pillars. Martin was without words as they slowly made the round of the ambulatory, following and smiling together over the delightful frescoes. It all seemed to him a piece of the magic of this woman who had so unexpectedly released him from the intolerable mood of the morning.

Suddenly, among the sarcophagi, fragments of

sculpture, and commemorative marbles which strew that painted cloister, a tablet caught his eye. It was in old French, with a flavour of Italian, and together they picked out the quaint lettering:

D O M

Cy gist Achilles Gvibert de Chevigny, fils de
Pierre Gvibert, Escvier, Sievr de Chevigny, Conseiller,
Secretair dv Roy, Maison, Covronne deFrance
et de Dame Clavde Gviet Gallard dela
Paroisse Sainct Andre dela ville de Paris, le qvel
Achille av sortir del' Accademie, et des
movsquetaires dv Roy, vovlovst faire le voiage
DItalie et sen retovrnant deRome en France, estant
tombe malade Alivovrne, povr changer dair, se fit
porter en cette ville de Pise, ov, apres avoir recev les
saincts sacremens ordonnez par nostre mere saincte
Eglise, il movrvt, et fvst enterre en ce saint liev, le
XXI: iovr Daovst MDCLXXIV: agee de XXVI: ans.
Priez Diev povr le salvt de son ame.
Fait par le tres cher amy dela nation, et
Maison de France, Labbe Gaetani archidiacre de cediocese.

For a moment they were silent. In the stillness of that sequestered place the forgotten story seemed to live again. Then Martin put his finger to the stone:

"See!" he exclaimed. "It was the twenty-first of August. And to-day is the twenty-first!"

His companion turned her eyes to his, with a curious smile.

"And I came to show you! If I had any qualms about *les convenances* I have none now."

They were silent again, looking at each other and at the white tablet. There was something in the little coincidence which seemed to Martin strangely significant.

"'*Lequel Achille voulut faire le voyage d'Italie.*' How near it makes him seem, poor boy! I did not think of there being trippers then," he said with a smile. "There was no Shelley; not even a Goethe and a Mignon—two hundred and thirty-three years ago!"

She made no reply at first. Then she said, softly:

"I wonder how it was with Dame Claude. There were other things that lacked then, beside your poets. It must have taken time for the Abbé Gaetani's letter to get to Paris."

"However it was then, it happily makes no difference now," returned Martin. A rising elation filled him—out of the utter unexpectedness of this meeting, out of its picturesqueness, out of the infinity of possibilities which it might promise. He was accordingly amazed at the vehemence with which his companion turned upon him.

"Why do you say that?" she exclaimed. "You who brought me here, and on this day! Have you forgotten the gateway by the river? Now is not the time. The time was when the horseman clattered up the cobble-stones of St. André and into the courtyard of the Hôtel de Chevigny; when Dame Claude seized the packet from the page at the door and ran with it to the *secretaire du roi;* when he broke the seal, read the first lines of the Abbé Gaetani, went

white to the lips, looked at Dame Claude, and turned away. It was then that it made a difference. It was then that nothing else made a difference. Things come, and then other things come. Time is only a chain to hold us to them—or away from them. It is mere chance whether it breaks all at once or by degrees. . . ”

Martin watched her keenly as she spoke, white in the shadow of the cloister, her hair dark against the wan frescoes. There was a curious contrast between the vivid modern figure and those faded images of a life so dim and far away. And recalling the palace gate he wondered what there might be of consistency or inconsistency between what she said so lightly then and what she said so intensely now. And why? Where had she been, what had she done, yesterday, all the other days that went before their chance meeting by the Arno?

She stopped, as if reading in his eyes. She touched the white stone softly.

“Good-bye, poor Achille,” she said—“you and your twenty-six years.”

She did not speak again as they passed on. But at one of the openings into the green quadrangle a sudden impulse seized her. She stepped down into the grass and picked some crimson-tipped daisies growing there. Then she went back and laid them on top of the tablet, adding:

“That is for Dame Claude, who was not here all those years ago to-day.”

III

They sat where they could follow the shining river coils that wound down out of the hills, dived under the red of the city roofs, and wound on again into the iridescent plain. Through the haze of the Maremma the glint of the sea at last began to burn, and out of the north issued ghostly the apparition of the Carrara mountains. The day had somehow flamed away, there in that leaning gallery in the corner of the city wall, where the storied marbles stood alone with their shadows—a little fleet of ships becalmed in a quiet haven of the world.

"I am like the wicked in Scripture," she said. "I love groves and high places."

"I would say rather that you were like the Empress Elisabeth," rejoined Martin. It seemed to him that they had always been there, that they would always remain there—he and this woman whose very name he did not know.

"Why am I like the Empress Elisabeth?" she asked.

"Haven't you read Christomanos?"

"What is that?"

"Your ignorance is the first gratification my vanity has had to-day!" laughed Martin. "Christomanos is the hero of a modern fairy story—which is all the prettier for being true. It is a kind of inverted 'Cinderella.' He was a little Greek student in the university of Vienna, who lived in a garret

in an alley. You know the kind? With stair gables, and bread shops, and clothes lines? Imagine a Greek there! And one day a court carriage rumbled up, just as if it had suddenly rolled out of a pumpkin, and carried him off to talk Greek to the empress. The carriage came every morning after that; and he would spend the day in the imperial park at Lainz, and go back at night to his stair gable. And at last he went to live in the palace altogether, and talked to the empress while she had her hair combed, and walked leagues with her, and went to Schönbrunn and Miramar and Corfu. Of course the ladies-in-waiting were scandalised, but she was used to that—and he was something of a poet."

"And after she died he wrote a book about it. Which shows how true a poet he was!"

"Wait till you read him. The thing was that people said such things about her, and he knew better; and it hurt him. Of course he couldn't help seeing the picturesqueness of it all, but he isn't nasty about it. Most of it is what she said about things."

"What did she say about things?"

Martin watched the profile beside him, out-lined against the marble of the tower and touched faintly by the glow of the westering sun.

"Well, one thing was a good deal like what you just told me about high places. Christomanos says that she always liked hills because there are so few untrampled places in the world."

"It was rather imperial of her to want to trample them herself, then. And your Christomanos sounds as if he lacked humour."

"I fancy he did," uttered Martin.

Something in his tone made his companion look at him.

"Don't be teased," she said. "Tell me more about them. How did it end? Did he run away, or did she send him away, or what?"

"O dear, no! The day of his going was set before he came."

"O! I begin to approve of your empress." She was silent a moment, looking out toward the sea. "How was it, do you suppose?"

"Why, she was ages older and wiser and everything else. It was only that she was terribly lonely and bored, and he could do things that she couldn't ask of a maid of honour, and was likewise *inclinè à comprendre*."

"O! And what about him?"

"He was so dazed that I don't suppose you can tell anything about him. He must have been dazed all the time—by the enormousness of the distance between them, by her tragic history, by her personality, her eyes, her hair, everything about her. And to drop out of it all—to go back to being a simple Greek student, and live in a stair gable, and be despised by bakers and washerwomen when he had been the familiar friend of their empress, must have been hard."

"Well, he had his moment," she mused. "Did anyone ever have more?"

"Likewise," chanted Martin:

> "'*Après le plaisir vient la peine;*
> *Après la peine, le bonheur!*'"

"But it's a high price," she commented, simply.

"It's worth it," asserted Martin.

"You have not sat enough upon towers!" She looked at him a moment, with a half smile, and then across the plain again. "No; it's not because this place is untrampled that I like to come here. But you can see over everybody's walls. You get some kind of proportion. And I like to think of all the people—under these roofs, in that haze. Common life is what pleases me, and common people—simple people. Our ideas for ourselves are so single. They shut out so much that might be, and they hardly ever come out right. Our lives are generally made up of two or three real days, with years of waiting and remembering between. Common lives and common things are better, just as they happen, from day to day."

Martin studied her, half wondering what lay behind her words and half taken by the charm of her slow inflection. She turned under his eyes; and he asked at random:

"Do you come here often, for the tower?"

"Not very. I have one of my own, near Naples, where I have sat much and seen many things."

"Think of having a tower near Naples! And I have to sail in a month!"

"Would you like to exchange?" she asked, smiling.

"Wouldn't I!"

"Very well, we will!" she said, playfully. "I will throw in a view of the city and the bay, with a bit of Pozzuoli, and a big garden, and all the statues you can talk to, and an olive orchard that runs down hill to the sea, and a frog pond. . . ."

"There are worse things!" interrupted Martin.

"What?" she demanded, eyeing him curiously.

"New England!" he exclaimed, with a laugh.

"I suppose you will think so," she rejoined gravely, "until you have sat by yourself in a tower and listened to frogs in a pond. For that matter, though, the frogs are what I like best." She looked out again across the Maremma. The sea began to widen in the sunset, toward which the Arno ran in links of brightening fire. "No," she said at last. "It is not for us."

"What?" he asked.

"This!" she answered, waving her hand against the golden space before them. "We are of the North. We belong to mist and pallor and dreams. Here they have no dream. What is there left for them to dream about? They live. But we don't know how to live. We are always waiting—or remembering."

"As a background, however, I would prefer Campania to Vermont!"

"No, it is not for us," she repeated. "Our roots

are not here: how can we grow? But it is curious how it catches us all, and how it is typical of desire fulfilled. What does one ever really attain, really possess? Things are too great or too unresponsive, and always too mysterious. Even a little gem that you can hold in your hand and never let escape: how much is it yours—that strange indifferent fire? There is no possession. Instead of getting something else we lose something of ourselves. After all, people like Achille down there are happiest, who live their moment so intensely that they lose themselves all at once instead of by slow shreds and patches. The moment is everything. After that——" She put her hand to her cheek with a motion of weariness. Then she suddenly looked at Martin and laughed. "Do you see that sun? I presume the police have already been notified of my disappearance! I must beg your pardon for having given you such a day of it, and ask you to take me down."

She sprang to her feet and Martin followed, reluctantly.

"I suppose I shall wake up," he said, as they descended the winding steps, "and find that you were a dream. When I feel as I do, that I have known you all my life, and then reflect that twelve hours ago I had never set eyes on you—that even now I know no more about you than that you have a tower in Posilipo—I am inclined to doubt the so-called realities of existence."

Again she laughed.

"Why? The actual matter of prolonged passions has occupied less time! I don't see what more I could possibly tell you. The rest would be merely frills. But people waste so much time in these things. Don't you think so? They miss so many chances, waiting for each other to begin and manœuvring each other to the proper point. That is why I came with you this morning—because you lost no time. Think how different it would have been if you had not waylaid me so unpardonably!"

Martin did think so. The consciousness of it suddenly overwhelmed him as they came out into the deserted square and crossed to the *Via Santa Maria.* He would not even have looked back, but for his companion.

"See!" she cried.

The dome of the baptistery, the roof of the cathedral, the top of the tower where they had been, were alight with a delicate rose glow which contrasted extraordinarily with the cold white of the lower shadow. The spectacle was to Martin symbolic and revealing. He saw as if apart from himself the romance of his day. Could it really have been he to whom this adventure had fallen? He glanced furtively at his companion. Was she the intimate stranger with whom he had been? It pleased him that he had known herself before knowing things about her. There would be so much more significance in making last the steps of acquaintance which usually come first. But she looked weary, and a

thousand uncertainties, a thousand concerns, assailed him. He could not find courage to say the things which rose to his lips. His thoughts, however, wove themselves into a tissue of dreams.

So they went silently down the crooked street which at last left them on the *Lungarno Regio*. Martin hardly knew where he was. Through the gateway between the houses where the Arno wound out to the plain the splendour of sunset streamed into the city, touching the dusty façades with a fairy glamour, filling the sandy river bed with undreamed secrets of colour, transmuting the parcelled water into purple and gold. The quay where Martin had that morning discovered two persons was crowded with carriages and pedestrians enjoying the cool of the day. The theatrical vivacity of the people, their unaccustomed faces, their foreign speech, gave a new poignancy to his mood of exaltation.

One of the carriages in the slow progress caused some confusion by driving out of line. Martin noticed the handsome horses, the correct footman, the old lady with a black parasol. She eyed him narrowly as the landau drove up to the curb. He called the attention of his companion, who was looking toward the river.

She turned.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with a bow and a smile to the lady in the carriage, "I am afraid I must go." He looked blankly into her eyes as she hesitated a moment. "It was a nice day! It was so long since

I had seen anybody. And the cloister—that was nice. I shall always think of you there. It would have been so different if we had not been ready! Good-bye, Achille."

The footman held open the emblazoned door.

"Good-bye—Elisabeth!" said Martin, too dazed to think or utter more.

The door clicked, the footman leaped to his box, the coachman flicked the horses. Beside the black parasol a white one went up, hiding the figure behind it. Martin's first impulse was to follow, to see where the carriage went. He began to walk hastily in the direction it had taken, watching the two parasols. Then he stopped and turned resolutely away. *"Lequel Achille voûlut faire le voyage d'Italie,"* he said to himself. *"Priez pour le salut de son âme."*

Wondering miserably what he should do with himself, Martin cast an indifferent glance at the building in front of him. It was one of the high dark-browed Tuscan *palazzi*, broad-eaved and strong-barred like the great houses of Florence. The entrance was closed. Above the massive archway was a device that attracted the young man's attention. A fragment of chain hung there, from a bolt projecting above the keystone; and between the chain and a high stone escutcheon ran the legend, in letters of tarnished brass let into the weathered marble:

ALLA GIORNATA

MRS. DERWALL AND THE HIGHER LIFE

I

"MRS. Hopp, ma'am," announced the maid from the door.

"Mrs. Hopp?" repeated Mrs. Derwall slowly. "Very well. You may show her up here." And when no maid was there to answer: "I wonder what Julie Hopp wants now. People are so funny. The ones you like are as scarce as auks' eggs, while the ones who——"

But at that moment Mrs. Hopp somewhat prematurely appeared. Mrs. Derwall rose to meet her with outstretched hands:

"My dear, what grandeur! You must be out for a campaign."

"I am, Sophie dear," responded the caller with an effusive embrace. "And I want you to join it. Hurry up and put your hat on."

"If that were all I had to put on! And here you have been prinking since five o'clock in the morning. What in the world are you up to now?"

"Well," replied Mrs. Hopp, "I'm going in to town on the ten-twenty, to begin with. And then I'm going to lunch somewhere. And after that I'm going shopping——"

Mrs. Derwall began to shake her head.

"No use to come here, Julie. It's too soon after Christmas. And I'm on my June allowance now. I sha'n't be able to stir out of the house this year—except when Lou happens to feel a little kindly disposed."

The melancholy tone of this declaration caused Mrs. Hopp to smile.

"Well, I'll trust Lou!"

"If he would trust me it would be more to the point," sighed his wife.

"But it would be most so," pursued her caller, "if you'd only let me finish what I want to say. I've got a treat for you."

"O!" exclaimed Mrs. Derwall. "A s'prise?"

"Yes. Guess what it is."

"A matinée?"

"Something like it, only nicer. Not that everybody would think so; but people who know would. You will." And Mrs. Hopp beamed upon her friend with an expression in which the freemasonry of the truly superior outdid the archness of her who would incite to curiosity.

As it happened, this was an implication which never had a propitious effect upon Mrs. Derwall.

"Julie, you are so mystifying," she plaintively said. But she evinced so small a disposition to penetrate the mystery that her friend was compelled to resume her tactics.

"It's not just one of those silly plays, with a pretty

boy to play it," she uttered solemnly. "It's really literary, Sophie."

"O my!" cried Mrs. Derwall with mediocre enthusiasm. "What have I done, Julie, to deserve this?"

"You don't look as if you believed me, Sophie," protested Mrs. Hopp. "But just wait. It's Professor Murch's first lecture—Professor Richard Murch, you know. He's going to give a course on Browning and the Higher Life."

"O, is he?" The triumph with which Mrs. Hopp delivered herself of her momentous intelligence was only equalled by the calm with which her interlocutress received it. There ensued a brief pause, during which the two ladies studied each other. Then Mrs. Derwall suddenly realised that the floor was still hers.

"It's awfully sweet of you, Julie. But I don't know where you get the idea that I'm liter'y. I'm not a bit, you know—or poetical, either. And as for the Higher Life—why, really, Julie, life in the suburbs is high enough for me. I think you ought to take somebody who could appreciate it better. There's Miss Higginson, for instance."

"Miss Higginson!" burst out Mrs. Hopp. "I don't want Miss Higginson, Sophie. I want you. And you needn't tell me you don't care for such things. I know you better. You are too modest. And if you could hear that man—the things he says——!"

Mrs. Derwall sat up very straight.

"H'm, my dear! No, thank you. I might gulp down Browning, perhaps. But I can't swallow your Perch——"

"Murch, Sophie."

"Murch, then, on top of him. There I draw the line."

Mrs. Hopp looked a little agitated.

"What do you mean, Sophie? Do you—do you, perhaps, know anything against him?"

"Yes, I do," declared Mrs. Derwall.

"What?" inquired Mrs. Hopp with hesitation. "Is it anything I should know?"

"Indeed it is, my dear! But if you haven't found it out yet you never will," replied Mrs. Derwall with more emphasis than tact.

"What?" asked Mrs. Hopp again. "I wouldn't want to be countenancing anything, you know."

"Well," put forth Mrs. Derwall oracularly, "any man who spends his time talking to women is a fool. I don't care what he talks about."

Mrs. Hopp stared at her friend with a dumb amazement in which there was something of expectation unfulfilled. At last, however, she found words of protest.

"But, Sophie—aren't you a woman yourself?"

"I'm sorry to say I am," admitted Mrs. Derwall, without hedging. "And I'm heartily ashamed of it."

Mrs. Hopp was again lost in stupefaction. And then:

"Is it your idea, Sophie," she inquired a little distantly, "that we—that Professor Murch's friends make fools of themselves over him?"

"Since you ask, Julie love, I am obliged to confess that you divine my idea precisely."

"Sophie, you're horrid!" retorted Mrs. Hopp. "Men could go if they wanted to, but they're too busy—and too many other things. Don't you sometimes think, Sophie, that men are a little lacking in some things? That they are rather—coarse?" But a light in her companion's eye warned her back to relevancy. "Besides, he's married."

"All the worse!" briskly commented Mrs. Derwall, whose sex enabled her to follow the train of Mrs. Hopp's thought. "And I can be pretty sure that you've never seen his wife."

"It's perfectly true that I haven't," proclaimed Mrs. Hopp, unabashed. "But it's a case of 'unknown wives of famous men'—don't you know? She's probably nice enough, only the quiet sort you don't get acquainted with easily. And perhaps"—Mrs. Hopp took on an air of high misericord—"not very congenial. You'd think that if she really cared for what her husband says she'd be more in evidence at his lectures."

Mrs. Derwall let herself go the length of a laugh.

"As if she didn't know them by heart! I guess she's sorry for the day she first let herself listen to them. She probably taught Lurch——"

"Murch, Sophie."

"Murch, then, what an agreeable sensation it was to have ladies hang on his lips; and when she got tired of listening he tried it on the rest of you. Besides, if she were there it would spoil the whole show."

"Sophie, you're just as nasty as you can be!" cried Mrs. Hopp. "He needs the money. I know he does. He looks so ill, too—so pale and thin. It makes your heart ache to see him. And when he reads 'James Lee's Wife'——"

Words failed her. As for Mrs. Derwall, she gave vent to a perceptible sniff.

"Of course he looks pale! Anybody can look pale. You can look pale. I can look pale. How can he help looking pale if he eats all the luncheons you stuff him with? And if he looked red and fat do you suppose anybody would pay him to read love poems?"

Mrs. Hopp tossed her head.

"It's all very well for you to talk. But you haven't seen him, and I have. Besides, you haven't been through things. If you knew what the world really is! If you knew, Sophie Derwall!" Mrs. Hopp, who was in receipt of comfortable alimony from a good-natured button manufacturer, darted upon her friend the meaning glances of one who has drained life's goblet to the lees. "No, some people are fated to make mistakes. And to pay for them, Sophie. I know Professor Murch is unhappy. If

you could only hear how he talks about Mr. and Mrs. Browning——!"

Mrs. Derwall was able to contain herself no longer.

"Julie Hopp!" she burst out. "Never speak to me again of Mr. and Mrs. Browning! Never! never! never! I can't stand them. They were the two most colossal bores and fakes of the nineteenth century! Posilutely!"

The other lady was at first too horrified for words. Then dignity and scorn supported her, like caryatides, on either hand. Which spectacle, it must be said in passing, restored to Mrs. Derwall her tranquillity.

"Sophie Derwall," at length demanded the outraged Mrs. Hopp, "how dare you say such monstrous things? Do you mean to tell me—you who pretend to read so much, to care so little for ephemeral literature—do you mean to tell me that you care nothing for Browning?" To register her intonation of the sacred syllables is a feat quite beyond the resources of unfeeling print.

"Very little, Julie," responded Mrs. Derwall pleasantly, "very little. And the fact that ten million women go into spasms over him makes me care less. I prefer Lewis Carroll."

At that moment Providence interposed, in the person of the maid.

"A gentleman in the reception-room, ma'am. What shall I——?"

Mrs. Hopp rose with majesty.

"I won't keep you, Sophie. I must catch my train. I am sorry you won't come with me. You don't know what you miss. And we may not have many more opportunities to do things together. I meant to tell you—if you had given me a chance."

Mrs. Derwall took it with humility, yet with amiability.

"You really make me ashamed of myself, Julie," she returned. "It was lovely of you to think of me. I'll go with you another time—to the Palace or the Rivoli, perhaps. They are more in my line, you know. Good-bye, dearie."

II

"Is this the lady of the house?" inquired the gentleman in the reception-room as Mrs. Derwall appeared upon the threshold.

This question caused her to halt in her progress, and recalled to her mind the fact that she had responded to the maid's announcement with rather more precipitation than she might under other circumstances have displayed.

"It is," she somewhat stiffly replied. "But I regret to say that she requires no books to-day."

"O, please wait a minute!" cried the caller as she started to retire. "I knew I should trip up. I was so sure you would take me for a book agent that I hypnotised myself into beginning like one. But I'm not one. I never was one. I never shall be one. I abominate books!"

He ended almost violently. And as she listened Mrs. Derwall could see very well that he was not what she thought.

"I won't run away yet, then," she laughed. "You are too encouraging. I have just estranged a lifelong friend by telling her much the same thing, and I was in danger—well, of caving a little."

"Dear me! Don't cave when you have as good ground as that under your feet! What will you do when you get to a real quicksand? I evidently appeared on the scene just in time. I shall give you all the moral support you want. I dare say I can damn and double-damn books in more kinds of ways than you ever dreamed. Life is so amusing that I continually wonder how people can turn their eyes from it long enough to look at a book."

"How about the Higher Life?" inquired Mrs. Derwall demurely.

"What in the world is that?" demanded the caller, mystified. He looked about the room, much as if he expected to see its legs sticking out from behind the curtains.

"Don't ask me!" Mrs. Derwall waved it from her. "Ask any other woman but me. I don't know. I don't want to know. I've just refused to go to town with my lifelong friend and find out. There's a Professor Richard Church, or Birch, or Smirch, or somebody, who tells people at two dollars a head. But it's not too late for you. The eleven-five train will do you quite nicely."

"Ah!" ejaculated the caller. "I don't think I'm in such a hurry as all that." He still looked rather curiously about, however. "But you frighten me. You frighten me more than I expected. I don't know whether I shall dare to tell you what I came for."

Mrs. Derwall, who found that things were going very well, encouraged him.

"Don't be afraid of me. I am quite harmless. More than that, I am the most helpless of creatures in the face of a determined appeal. What are you —patent medicine? Needles? Charity? Gold mines? I may invest in you yet."

"But it's nothing of that kind! It's just the opposite. I don't want to take money out of your pocket. I want to put it in."

"Then you're the man for me!" cried Mrs. Derwall. "Christmas has gone, and ruin stares me in the face!"

"You reassure me," smiled the caller. "But don't go too far. Don't, for instance, imagine me the attorney of a maiden aunt, come to hand over a handsome legacy. And don't read pure altruism in my countenance. I——" He began to laugh. "Shall I say it?"

"If it's respectable," said Mrs. Derwall. "You begin to make me ask myself questions."

"It's only too respectable, heaven knows! But it's a little unexpected. It will take your breath away. You may scream. You might even faint.

One never can tell what ladies will do. Are you temperamental?"

Mrs. Derwall sniffed. There was that in her sniff however, which intimated that she was not unwilling to hear what her visitor had to impart.

"I like that! Do I look so much like the Eternal Feminine? Do your direst and I promise you not to make a scene."

"Well, then," said the caller, "I throw the responsibility on you. I came in to buy your house."

If faces could fall, as literature popularly affirms, Mrs. Derwall's would have bumped the floor with some force. As it was she treated her interlocutor to a stare in which the surprise he had predicted mingled with disillusion. She therefore stretched the truth.

"Why, I don't want to sell my house," she uttered briefly.

The stranger did not appear to be in the least disconcerted.

"So far, so good. I've found out, at any rate, that the house is yours to sell. It might have been somebody else's. And let me congratulate you on your self-control."

"As a matter of fact, it is somebody else's—namely my husband's," rejoined that gentleman's consort with dignity.

"O, well, that is a mere detail which does not affect the case," remarked the caller easily. "Of

course the point is whether you would make any objection to his parting with it."

Mrs. Derwall glanced vaguely about. As a matter of fact, she and Lou had discussed the matter no later than last night. But to have the hypothetical purchaser suddenly materialise made her search her own mind again. Besides, she felt an indefinable resentment against her visitor for having turned out so much less interesting than he seemed to promise.

"What in the world do you want of the place?" she asked at last.

"Nothing improper, I assure you! I merely want to live in it."

"But why? Have you ever been in it before? Does it hold some romance for you?"

"Romance! Heavens no! What have romance and I to do with each other? I am a married man. I just happened to be passing by, and it beckoned to me. 'That is the house for me,' I said, and I walked straight in."

"But what do you see in it?" demanded Mrs. Derwall, casting her eye once more about.

"I see everything you don't," responded the caller quickly. "To say nothing of a very agreeable hostess, it's just the right size, it's just the right colour, it's in just the right place. How did you happen to build it so exactly for me?"

"We didn't!"

"Madam, you surprise me. You exhibit every symptom of a lady who has lived to repent of her

architectural errors. If you bought the house outright, as I hope to do, I should not expect that you would even listen to me. As it is, however, I have hopes of prevailing upon you to let me have it."

"I have nothing to say about it," replied Mrs. Derwall with an air of finality. "You will have to see my husband."

"Of course! And I shall be delighted to do so at the earliest possible moment. But in the meantime, in order that I may do so with the more intelligence, would you mind showing me the premises?"

Mrs. Derwall laughed in spite of herself.

"Gracious! How persistent you are! You are perfectly welcome to look around. Only mind: I don't exhibit as to a prospective buyer; I show as to a visiting friend. I have no more idea of getting up and moving out and going all through the torment of architects and builders and strikes and heaven knows what, than I have of——"

"Of going to Professor Murch's lectures," suggested the caller with a smile.

"Yes. Thank you. I couldn't think of anything impossible enough. Will you come this way? This is the reception-room, you see. There is a library on the other side of the hall." And without further ado she led the way through the rooms.

Having recovered her poise, and perhaps with a new appreciation of her companion's qualities, Mrs. Derwall proceeded to enter into the spirit of the occasion—as she well knew how. They had a very

lively time of it. They went upstairs. They went downstairs. They explored every cupboard and cubbyhole. They examined the plumbing. They criticised the colour schemes. Mrs. Derwall expatiated on all the disadvantages of the house. Her visitor seized unerringly upon every advantage. And so at last they completed in the cellar their round of inspection.

"This is the very nicest part of the house," sighed Mrs. Derwall. "It's so dry and comfortable and cosy that I often wake up in the night and wish I were in it!"

The visitor turned solemnly upon her.

"Madam," he began, "its qualities are such that I am completely undone. Such a laundry, such storerooms, such coal-bins, never were on sea or land. I shall not draw a peaceful breath until they are mine. Believe me, madam; never, never in this world. You will do me an irreparable injury if you refuse to sell me this house. You don't care two pins about it. I do. Sell it to me, then. It is small, but I shall give you sixteen thousand dollars for it. Now, this minute." And drawing a cheque-book from his pocket he uncapped his fountain-pen. "What name shall I put down?"

Mrs. Derwall was too much surprised by the suddenness of his onslaught to answer.

"Isn't it a fair price?" inquired her companion. "If you don't think so I am sure we shall have no trouble in coming to terms."

"Yes," uttered Mrs. Derwall slowly. "But——"

The stranger cut her off.

"Of course I have no idea of trying to force you to do what you don't want. So far as that goes, however, I fancy that you're pretty well able to take care of your end of a bargain. But it strikes me as rather a good deal for you. You can recoup yourself for Christmas, and then you can go to Palm Beach or Cairo or Zanzibar or somewhere for the bad part of the winter, while I am freezing here."

"Why, when would you want to come in?" asked Mrs. Derwall.

"Let's see." He began calculating on his fingers. "To-day is Thursday. Friday, Saturday, Sunday—I want to come in Monday. Next Monday. That will give me time to get settled before Wednesday."

Mrs. Derwall all but shrieked.

"Why, my dear man, have you lost your mind? I never heard of such a thing in my life. It would take me from now till then to get ready if I began this minute. And I have a week-end party on and couldn't begin to touch a thing till Tuesday at the very earliest. I like your blandness!"

He was imperturbable.

"My dear lady, you can do it perfectly well. I have done it myself a dozen times. All it needs is a little generalship. You just arrange things beforehand—with squads of packers and cleaners to follow each other. You could clear out Windsor Castle in

a day, that way. Of course I divide the expense with you. Come, what name shall I write?"

Mrs. Derwall hardly heard him through. She collapsed upon a soapbox, and she laughed until her visitor began to scratch his head.

"You ridiculous man!" she gasped, wiping her eyes. "I declare, you deserve the house! A man who knows what he wants to that degree! Who in the world are you, that you suavely propose to me to move out in a day? It's like carrying off the roof from over my head! Go on! You shall have it in spite of everything. I don't know what my husband will do to me, but it's not often given one to be sublime. Louis N. Derwall is the name. L-o-u——"

And off she went again. By the time she came back the cheque was ready for her. She took it with a certain eagerness, for she was not without her curiosities. But after one glance she suddenly sobered. She eyed the paper some time without saying a word. Finally, however, she looked up at the signatory, who stood quizzically watching her.

"Professor Richard Murch?" she asked.

"The same!" responded that personage, with an elaborate bow.

"The Professor Richard Murch who lectures to ladies about Browning and the Higher Life?"

"The very one. And if I don't hurry I shall be late for the lecture you refused to go to. Will you come now?"

She did not answer at first. She looked him slowly up and down for as much as a minute. Then she rose, leisurely crossed the cellar to the furnace, opened the door, and threw in the cheque. After which she looked back over her shoulder.

"No thank you, professor. And that's what I think of you and your cheque. Good morning."

She turned her back on him again. She took up a shovel. She made for the coalbin.

At that Mr. Murch, who had hitherto said nothing, started across the floor.

"Permit me, Mrs. Derwall. You may not care to sell me so admirable a furnace, but you will, at least, allow me to stoke it this once."

The offended matron tossed her head.

"By no means, Mr. Murch. I wouldn't think of letting you soil your poetical hands. Remember your ladies. They pant for you. As for me, I am quite able to look after my own furnace, thank you. I am not a disciple of the Higher Life, you know. I make pies instead of reading poetry. And when it comes to shovelling coal, I dare say I am rather more expert than you are." With which she emptied her shovel through the furnace door.

"Madam, it pains me to contradict you" remarked the professor, who had kept a critical eye upon this manœuvre. "I am only too well aware that my other offences are gross enough. But Truth and Honour alike compel me to confess that I can shovel coal better than that!"

Mrs. Derwall's wrath had hitherto maintained lofty heights. But she now began to break down. She betrayed the first signs of a womanly irritation. She snorted contemptuously. "I'd like to see you! I bet you can't."

The professor held her eye.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"I do mean it, Mr. Murch!" rejoined Mrs. Derwall with some spirit. "What's more, I'll stake the house on it. If you can throw three shovelfuls into that furnace without dropping one coal or once hitting the side of the door, I'll take another cheque from you."

The lecturer to ladies smiled.

"That's a sporting proposition, Mrs. Derwall. But as evidence that I have no wish to get your house from you again under false pretences, I will thank you for your courtesy and wish you a very good morning."

"Come, come, Mr. Murch!" cried Mrs. Derwall derisively. "You don't back out like that. I want to see how well you acquit yourself. Here's the shovel. And if you fulfill the terms it is yours—with the house."

He took the shovel which she handed him. He looked at her a moment, to give her time to retract. He got out his fountain pen again and started to rewrite his cheque.

"Seventeen thousand, did we say?" he inquired.

Mrs. Derwall chuckled on her soap box.

"I don't take bribes, Mr. Murch. Why not make it fifteen? Cheques are cheaper than houses."

He made it fifteen, and he presented it to Mrs. Derwall. Then he turned to the furnace. And he put in two shovels full of coal so quickly and so neatly that Mrs. Derwall saw her house slipping from under her feet. But before filling the shovel the third time Mr. Murch faced her.

"By the way," he said. "Do you happen to know a Mrs. Hopp?"

Mrs. Derwall stiffened.

"Yes. She was here when you came."

"Dear me! Why did you send her away? I really came out here, you know, to buy her house. I—I hear she wants to sell it. Would you advise me to look at it?"

Mrs. Derwall examined her cheque reflectively.

"Do you lecture as well as you shovel coal, Mr. Murch?"

"Goodness no!" he replied. "I worked my way around the world, once, as a stoker. But I make more money out of Browning. I fancy I make more than he did. Don't you think, though, that I'd better take a look at your Mrs. Hopp? As you say, cheques are cheaper than houses."

Mrs. Derwall re-examined her cheque.

"She isn't there. You're keeping her waiting in town while you snatch my house from over my head. She——"

A heavy tread sounded on the cellar stair. There

descended into view a large and florid gentleman who gazed with some surprise, first at the well-dressed stranger who stood in front of his furnace, toying familiarly with his coal shovel, then at Mrs. Derwall, seated on her soap box as it were in her boudoir, conversing with the same.

Mrs. Derwall rose to the occasion.

"O Lou!" she cried. "Don't you think a cheque in the hand is worth two in the bush? We start for Zanzibar Monday night. I've found you a buyer for the house. Mr. Murch, Mr. Derwall."

And she handed Lou the cheque.

THE BATHERS

THE painter laughed as he splashed into the shallows. A million crabs were idling in the linked gold of the sun, and they scurried away or burrowed frantically into the sand at his irruption among them. He waded on, catching his breath delightedly at the freshness of the rising water. The fancy came to him that he was entering a new world by this downward path: he wondered how the clouds would look from the bottom of the sea—and the stars, and the scudding *bragozzi*. He glanced back a moment, to the world from which he had fled. The Alps filled the horizon with pale outlines of shadow. Between them and the long spit of the Lido were shining lagoon spaces, out of which the clustered towers seemed to look wistfully over into the unpent sea. With the vividness of mirage he recalled a placid water avenue winding green between its lines of awninged palaces. Then he turned from it all, in sudden hatred of his artificial life, of the restlessness to express. He envied the fisherfolk under their butterfly sails out there where the Adriatic swept bare and blue to the east. There were the true creators! They did not copy those colours to hang on a wall. They made them—to blow in the open sea, to toss

unspoiled in the rains of heaven! They did not watch. They lived.

The painter threw himself forward with a great splash, opening wide his arms and ducking his head as if in homage. He laughed as he came up. Blinking and sputtering, he swam lazily to the full extent of his limbs in the joy of finding himself in a new element, rid of the last conventionality of clothes. The content of it filled him. As he moved over green abysses, somehow hanging miraculously as he chose, he seemed to be free from even so dogging a burden as Gravity. And his whole body—not merely hands and face—was alive to poignant sensations, to the freshness and rhythm of the sea.

A long time he drifted in the slow swell, jealous to take in the tingle of sea and sun and sky through every pore. And as he idly floated there a shout suddenly startled him from behind, and a great dash of water half choked him. Then someone began to laugh, but stopped short. When at last he could breathe and see, he found a young man regarding him out of smiling eyes that tried to look grave.

"I beg your pardon," said the newcomer, who spoke in the slow dialect of the lagoon—so different from the slippery talk of the Venetians. "I thought you were my brother. He is of the *dazio* here at Alberoni, and I meant to surprise him. I would not have disturbed you if I had known."

"No matter," replied the painter. "There is room in the sea for both of us."

The other laughed, regarding the painter curiously.

The painter returned the gaze as frankly. With the skilled eye of his craft, yet almost as if his fancy were realised and this were the first met of a new race, he noted the clear tanned skin, the set of the neck, the turn of the sinewy arm. He wondered how they would understand each other, forgetting that they had already spoken.

"You are not from Chioggia," said the stranger. "I know almost everybody there; and then you do not speak their language. I know the Pellestrina dialect too, and the Venetian, and the Buranello; but yours is different from them all. Where is your country? I am from Malamocco."

The painter smiled.

"Venice is my country now," he answered, "but I speak the Florentine dialect." Although he had picked up the speech of the lagoon his foreign accent always betrayed him.

"Ah, *Fiorenza!*" exclaimed the stranger, using the beautiful old name which the Florentines themselves have discarded. "That is on the mainland, isn't it? I have been only to places on the lagoon, like Campalto and La Rana. But I would like to see Florence, too. . . You swim differently there, as well as talk differently," he added, watching the painter's stroke. "This is the way we swim." He struck out hand over hand, throwing his body from one side to the other with great splashes. He made such headway that the painter could not keep up with him. "If

you swam that way I think you would go faster," he suggested politely.

"I am afraid not," returned the painter. "I don't swim very well."

"Can you dive?" asked the stranger. "Let's see who can bring up something first." He turned a somersault and disappeared glimmering into the green depths, whence presently he shot up waving a streamer of seaweed. "Didn't you get anything?" he asked, noting his companion's empty hand.

"I didn't even try," smiled the painter. "You swim much better than I."

"*Ma!*" exclaimed the other. "I have probably had more practice." He paused, half embarrassed. "I think I will swim out a little. Will you come?"

"Thank you, but perhaps not," replied the painter. "I have been out a good while. I am going in now."

"Well, have you forgiven me for drowning you?" laughed the stranger. "*A rivedersi!*"

The painter watched till the black head was a mere dancing speck in the water.

"That was amusing," he thought. "He wouldn't have called me 'thou' if I had had my clothes on. And he is a better man than I. . ."

Back on the beach the painter abandoned himself anew to sheer sensation. He did not think. He scarcely remembered. He simply felt in every nerve the glow of the sun, the caress of the air, the pulse of the sea lapping softly at his feet. As he lay there, happy and languid in the warm sand, the sound of

splashing in the shallows came like an intrusion. But opening his eyes he saw the young man of Malamocco come up from the water, seemly and sunburned and glistening in the light. It might have been a young sea-god rising from the waves. The painter smiled as he watched the dripping apparition, so in keeping with his humour. The youth caught the smile and answered it. He came and threw himself down in the sand beside the painter. They looked at one another, the smile still in their eyes.

The painter was glad he had hidden his clothes. He felt how absurd were those distinctions in the world from which he came, of nationality, of belief, of rank. They could be laid aside with one's coat. This was another world, with other standards. He and the young man beside him—by what different roads had they travelled to this beach! But what influence in their lives had wrought upon them like that secret pre-natal influence which on separate continents, among different races, had cast them in an identical mould? Here lay the two of them together by the sea, children both of earth, without distinction or preference between them—unless that most ancient preference of earth for the fit.

"How white you are!" exclaimed the stranger. "I am all black from the sun." He lifted his arm to show how the darkness of the lower tan shaded into tone but a trifle paler. "When we fish in the lagoon we often go like this. But even on the sea the sun burns through our clothes. I have always been black.

I never saw anybody so white as you are—except perhaps women, and sick people, and the *signori* at the Lido."

Shame filled the painter—shame, and a passionate envy. He looked admiringly at the young fisherman stretched out beside him, followed all the lines of the strong bronzed figure, without a curve of excess in its supple youth, and without one of deficiency. Then he glanced at his own lank white limbs. He felt the cut of being classed with women and sick people and *signori!* This was the only shame of nakedness—to have a body not worth looking at. Instinctively he took up handfuls of the fine sand and poured it over himself. The mockery of the life he had fled from that morning surged back over him. How he hated the imprisonment of houses, the lure of ambition, the thirst for pleasure, that had made him what he was! How he envied this fisherman his life of sun and sea, and his untroubled youth, and his unspoiled body!

"You take too little at a time," laughed the fisherman. He sat up to scoop out great handfuls of sand, which he threw over the painter's body until it was quite buried. Then he heaped a mound over himself, and looked inquiringly at the painter. "I know by your skin that you are not of my *mestiere.* But people in Venice do many things. What is your trade?"

The painter felt more comfortable under the sand, and the unsuspecting "*ti*" of the dialect touched him again.

"My *mestiere* is to paint," he said. "I make pictures."

"Ah, that is a nice trade! My cousin is on one of the Chioggia steamers, and he makes pictures of the *bragozzi* when he has taken the tickets. You should see how beautiful they are. Do you paint *bragozzi?*"

"Yes, and other things: houses, and gardens, and sometimes people."

"It must be very difficult. Did you have someone to show you how?"

"Yes," answered the painter gravely. He thought of New York, and Paris, and the great galleries.

"Ah! That is different. My cousin says faces are very hard, unless you have a master. But he does *bragozzi* well because he knows all about them. His father builds them. He sold one once for ten francs. Do you sell yours?"

"Sometimes. But I paint a great many more than I sell."

"So does my cousin. He gives them to people to hang in their houses. And in the shops he buys more cheaply if he gives a *bragozzo*. Do you do anything else?"

It was evident that the fisherman's conception of the picture market was based on the sale effected by his relative, and that his deductions regarding the painter's income were therefore not dazzling.

The painter was pleased. He had feared lest a breach separate him and his companion too early in their relations.

"No," he confessed. "I don't know how to do anything else."

The fisherman looked at him in surprise.

"But who knows?" he pursued encouragingly. "If you do nothing else perhaps you will come to paint big pictures with gold frames—like the ones under the *procuratie* in the Piazza San Marco. My cousin says the artists who paint those are *signori*. Then it will be a trade! I shall never be a *signor* at mine. Do you know how long it takes me to earn ten francs?"

The painter remembered how often he had seen fishermen in their long brown stockings and wooden shoes before the brilliant windows of the Piazza. Never before had he conceived of them otherwise than as a picturesque foil to the glitter of civilisation.

"No," he replied. "But your *mestiere* is better than mine. It keeps you out of doors; and what you do is necessary to people more than what I do."

"*Ma!* It is a pleasure to be on the sea in a good wind. I would not like to be shut up in a shop, or anything like that. But we make so little. And the winter! Sometimes we do not even catch enough to eat. You can make a picture whenever you want, but I can't catch a fish whenever I want!"

"Yes, but you can eat your fish when you do catch him, while my picture is no good to me unless I sell it. I can't eat it. And it isn't the kind of thing that everybody wants to buy, like a fish."

"That is so. But if people don't like your picture

you can ask them what they do like, and sit down and paint it for them. *Ecco!* And in the winter you can stay comfortably by the hearth in the kitchen, and make your pictures of boats and flowers and summer and what else do I know, while outside it snows. But I have to go into the sea to get my fish, if I get shipwrecked for it."

The painter smiled, still envying the strong brown body buried in the sand beside him. And then he suddenly asked:

"Have you ever been shipwrecked?"

"Only once," answered the fisherman, as if it were an every-day matter.

"Tell me about it," demanded the painter eagerly, turning on his elbow to eye this person who had been through shipwrecks and thought nothing of it.

"*Ma!* I was small then," began the fisherman apologetically, as if he would be less awkward now. "It was in my grandfather's *bragozzo*, one night in March. We were blown on to the Punta dei Sabbioni, and the boat broke in two." He stopped as if there were nothing more to say.

"Well, what happened? How did you get ashore?"

"God knows," replied the fisherman. "We fell into the water, and after a while I woke up with men rubbing me. My grandfather was there, too. My father and my brother were drowned."

"And then?"

"What was there to do then? We went home."

The picture of this common little seashore drama

flared up in the painter's imagination. He was impatient that it should be told him so barely. He wanted a hundred details, and he could not think how to bring them out.

"What did your mother do?" he asked, desperate.

"What do women do? She cried."

"Did they find your father and brother?"

"My father, yes; but not my brother. This makes one feel sleepy after being in the water, doesn't it?" He closed his eyes, turning a little his head from the sun.

The painter stared. In the life back there among the sculptured palaces these were things read, things far away as Olympus and the Crusades—not things seen. He felt like a child in the presence of one who has come back scarred from the wars.

Feeling the power of eyes upon him, the fisherman finally opened his own.

"How warm it is here, eh? It is better than that time at the Sabbioni. Ee-ee that was cold!" He drew up his shoulders as if to shiver, and the sand ran from him in rivulets. "I love the summer. I wish it would never end. We often come to this same place to pull in our nets; but it is not always so nice as this."

The painter was full of curiosity about a life to him so romantic.

"Do you come here in a *bragozzo?*" he asked, with the respect due to a superior, fearful of offending by too many questions.

"Oh, no," answered the fisherman. "It is too shallow. We come in a *caorlina*, about ten of us, and plant the nets, and afterwards drag them up on the sand."

"Oh, yes!" cried the painter. "I have seen it at Sant' Elisabetta—three or four men hauling at each rope, and then the net squirming with fish! And afterwards they beach the boats, and build fires on the sand, and have their breakfast." He had often sketched the bare-legged men and boys tugging at the ropes, and had thought how good their fresh fish and *polenta* must be in the morning air on the edge of the sea.

"Yes, we go there often. But the nets are not always squirming with fish. Sometimes we get nothing but crabs, cast after cast."

"Do you anything else besides go in the *caorlina?*" asked the painter.

"Hoo-oo!" exclaimed the fisherman in a high singing interjection, with an amused smile. "I go oftener in my uncle's *bragozzo*. We have none, because ours was lost when my father was drowned and we have never been able to get another. They cost more than the painted ones! We generally leave in the afternoon and stay out all night, so as to get the fish to the Rialto early in the morning. That is good—to lie on the deck after the nets are down, and watch the stars playing behind the sail, and the light-houses here and at Cavallino winking their eyes. And then to run in when the sun comes up all wet and cool out

of the sea, and the wind begins to blow! But in winter it is another affair, and when there are storms. Two or three boats are lost in every *Bora.*"

The painter's humility grew, as he inwardly compared the vicissitudes of studio life with this adventuring upon the deep.

"But you would rather live on the water than in a shop, didn't you say?"

"*Ma!* Now, yes—when the nights are a *delizia* and we have enough to eat. But in winter! Then it is another story." He propped himself up on his elbows and began excavating a reservoir, into which the water rose slowly. "No, I would not like to be in a shop. But I would like to be a *signor,* and have plenty of money without working, and eat meat every day, and in the winter always have a fire in the kitchen, and go as often as I liked to the inn. And I would like to go to other places, to see Florence, and all the countries in the world. That is what I would like the best of all. Sometimes steamers pass us in the sea at night, with lamps in all their little round windows, and people singing on the deck—high over the top of our mast—and it makes me sad. They pass so quickly, with the water white behind them, and their lights grow small and small in the dark, and disappear. Where do they go, the ships? I want to know, and go with them to the countries at the end of the sea." He looked across the painter toward the breakwater, where the sails of a pilot boat were bobbing up and down

and where, far away, the sea ran blue to the sky. "But I never shall. I have to catch fish for my family. They would not have enough if I went away. . . A boy I knew went to America, and now he sends home money to his mother—a great deal. He won a *terno* at the lottery, enough to pay for the steamer and then to keep him till he found a place. But I am not lucky. And even if I could go I could not take my wife, and my mother might have nothing to eat long before I could send her money. They speak another language there—and many things. Have you been to America?" He asked it nonchalantly, tracing arabesques in the damp sand of his reservoir, much as one might inquire, "Have you been to the moon?"

"Yes," answered the painter, absently, "I have been to America." He lay on his back, his hands under his head, looking into the sea. The gleam of its blue was curiously watered by ripples of shadow sweeping across it in shades from purple to the pallor of the sky. He wished that all evils were so calculable as winter; and he was touched by the simplicity of these ambitions, by the poetry of the lighted ships. He had not thought of a wife, the fisherman was so young. After all, had he not everything?

The fisherman turned instantly, forgetting his arabesques.

"You have been to America?" He sat up, edging nearer the painter and looking down at him with a strange and new curiosity. "You have been to

America! Why didn't you tell me before? What is it like?"

The painter was sorry. But he looked up at the eager face bent upon him, and he smiled.

"Oh, it is very much like this. There are fields and trees, and rivers run into the sea, and there is a sun every day, and sometimes there is a moon at night."

"A sun every day!" broke in the fisherman. "Sometimes there is none for a month here! I would like that. Is it like Venice—with *palazzi*, and gondolas, and the *campanile?*"

"No," answered the painter, "it is not like Venice. There are no gondolas and no *campanile;* and the *palazzi* are all new; and they don't have four, five, six floors, but fifteen, twenty, twenty-five."

"They must be as high as the *campanile*, then! And new! In Venice all the houses are so old. I like new things. Don't you?"

"Well—not so much," replied the painter. "It is hard to tell which of them will last. Old things are ones that were good enough to last."

"Oh!" said the fisherman. "What are the people like?"

"The people? They are like you and me. Only perhaps they don't like to lie all the afternoon in the sun, the way you and I do," he added, stretching his arms out wide in the sand and following a gull into the sky.

"Are they good?" pursued the fisherman. Good-

ness as applied to character has come in Italian to mean compliance rather than the sterner moral qualities expected in the North.

"Well, perhaps they are more apt to be 'bad' if one is from another country. I think it is because they do not understand. They speak another language, you know."

"Can you understand it?"

"M-m-m, generally."

"Say some!" demanded the fisherman. And after it he required a translation of the painter's phrase. "It is strange," he commented. "When you say those words I understand nothing; but you are saying the same things that we say in Italian!"

"Yes," said the painter. "They do not tell you new things in other countries. At first it sounds different, and then you find out that it is really the same. . ."

"Why, have you been to many of them?"

"I have been to some others."

"Tell me about them. Are they like America?"

"Yes, on the whole. Only some are a little hotter, some are a little colder. Then there are countries where the people are all black, you know—but really black, like your head. Or yellow, or red. There are countries, too, where the men dress like women; and others where they go like us, without any clothes at all. And I went once to one where it was light at night."

The fisherman edged a little closer, his eyes fast-

ened on the painter as if to win the secret of his strangeness and his fortune.

"If you have been so far you must have been on a steamer," he uttered slowly.

"Yes."

"I would like to go on a steamer, a big one, especially at night. Did you ever put your head through one of the little round windows where the lights are, and look down at the dark sea, and find a *bragozzo?*"

"Yes," answered the painter, "and I have seen the light from the little windows touch the sails, and the faces of the men looking up."

"And then you passed and left them in the night. How I wish I could have done that! But I was down in the *bragozzo,* and you were up in the great lighted ship, going to the countries at the end of the sea."

The wistfulness in his face hurt the painter, to whom the sense of the superiority of that perfect body, and of the simple life from which it had won its beauty and its strength, was keener than ever. He had meant only to entertain his companion, not to sharpen in him the sharpness of desire. How could he put convincingly what he really felt? But the fisherman went on, his face hanging almost over the painter's.

"Have you been to all the countries in the world?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Only to a few of them. And I don't care to see the rest."

"Why not? If I were like you, and had no one

else to think about, and could do my trade in any country, I would go to see them all."

"But why? You do not see new things when you travel. It is not worth while going on long journeys to see people who wear different clothes from ours, or have a different skin. They are always really the same. They are all born in the same way, and they all love and hate in the same way, and they all work to get bread and fish, and then they all die. These are the real things, the old things that people hide under their customs and their languages. You can see them here as well as anywhere else."

"It will be so," said the fisherman humbly. "You know better than I. But one gets tired of just the same thing every day, every week, every month, every year. It is like a week without Sunday. You have had your *festa*, but I never had mine."

"What you call *festa* was every day to me, and it did not make me happy."

"Then I wish I could have had your every day." He glanced out to sea a moment, where the fishing boats were tacking about as if to no purpose but to show off their butterfly wings. "Have you ever been hungry?" he asked, looking down at the painter again.

"No." The painter crushed a temptation to play with double meanings, and was ashamed to count the few dinners deferred that he could remember.

"I have," said the fisherman. "I have gone back to Malamocco on a winter morning after a night in

the *bragozzo,* and I have had to show my empty hands to my wife who was waiting at the door. And I have hunted in the fog for the Porto di Lido, when we tacked up and down outside, afraid to run in, until we were so cold and tired that I hoped the boat would go down. And I have seen my father's dead body washed up by the sea. These are the things that I have seen. But you——"

The painter sprang out of his lazy posture.

"What are the things I have seen to those!" he cried. "What do I know of the world, compared to you? You have seen more of life here in Malamocco than I ever did in all the strange cities I have seen! It is nothing to know how men say 'Good-morning' in other languages or how they look in foreign coats, if you know what they say on the decks of sinking ships, and how they look when they are washed up dead by the sea!"

For a moment the fisherman was silent, surprised by the other's vehemence. Then he said:

"Perhaps so. But what good does it do me to know these things? I would rather have your *mestiere.* It is not so monotonous. It is not so hard. It is not so sad——"

The painter jumped impatiently to his feet. He wanted to prove in some palpable way the inferiority of his manner of life, so that the fisherman could not help being convinced.

"Get up!" he cried. "Wrestle with me!"

"What shall I wrestle with you for?" asked the

fisherman in astonishment, sitting back with his hands propped behind him in the sand. "I want to talk about these things."

"You shall talk about these things afterward," laughed the painter. "Now I want to see how easily I can throw you. Get up!"

The fisherman obeyed slowly and stood, loose-jointed, waiting to see what the other would do. The painter suddenly clinched him, at which the fisherman's muscles reacted instinctively. There was a short sharp tussle; and the painter found himself on his back in the sand, panting, the other's knee on his chest.

"You see?" demanded the painter.

The fisherman rolled down in the sand beside him.

"Excuse me," he said. "When I felt you catch me I didn't think, and I put you down."

The painter laughed.

"Now you see how much better your trade is than mine?"

"No. What have trades to do with it? One of us had to go under. Another time you would probably beat me. Let's try again. Come!"

He started to get up, but the painter pulled him back.

"You know perfectly well that I couldn't beat you if I tried all day! Look at that!" He held out his arm this time, and made the fisherman do the same. "And look at that!" He stretched a lean white leg beside the muscular brown one of the fisherman.

The comparison made him wince, as he marked again how toil and peril had only wrought on the other's body like surpassing sculpture. He went on: "There is no reason why I should not be as strong and as good to look at as you. I am perhaps no older, and I am not ill, and I have never been hurt. Then why are we so different? It is just this very thing—the difference between our *mestieri*. For when you were pulling up nets on the sand, I was making little paper sunsets for people to buy—when they could have new and better ones every day for nothing, by looking out of the window! And when you were watching the stars play behind your sail, I was sitting in stuffy rooms. Lamps are not so good for one as stars! And when you were fighting the sea in storms, I was running about the world trying to find some new thing. And so you are what you are, and I am this!" He looked down at himself and laughed bitterly.

"That may be," said the fisherman, puzzled and a little embarrassed. "But what if I am strong? You are strong enough. You have not been prevented from enjoying. Was it worth while for me to do all those things just to be able to put you down? What difference does it make to me? I would rather have been in your place."

"No! Outside things cannot make you happy, unless they fit with something inside. And the things which make happiness are so few and so simple that anybody can find them—like love, and sunshine. That is all the good my journeys have done

me—to teach me this. I know these things, but you have them." He stopped abruptly.

The fisherman looked at him a long time saying nothing. When finally he spoke it was humbly, as one lower to one higher.

"What you say must be true, because you understand and I do not. Still—I wish I could be once on a lighted ship at night, and go to one of the countries at the end of the sea. I have never been, and you have. . ."

At first the painter did not answer, his eyes on the bronzed figure beside him. But then he smiled, curiously.

"Look!" he said. "We are all covered with the sand of the sea. We must brush it off and go back into the world."

RETARDED BOMBS

I

FOR the land's sake! If there isn't Jonas Lane!" burst out Miss Cockerill irrelevantly.

She so far forgot the respect due to a minister's wife, and that reserve which should be the portion of a maiden lady, as to forsake her chair for the window. Peering discreetly through her lattice of geraniums, she regarded with tense interest the actions of a gentleman who was emerging from a buggy in front of her neighbour's house. This person, after securing his horse to a ringed post, made his way with some deliberation toward the door.

"He's taken on flesh," pursued Miss Cockerill. She drew a trifle to one side in order to share her opportunity with her visitor, but losing nothing of what it was vouchsafed her to behold during the interval between the pull at the bell and the opening of the door. "She keeps him waitin', same as she's done for twenty years," commented the spectator.

The door at which he sued closed behind the expectant gentleman who had "taken on flesh." And as Miss Cockerill's most piercing gaze failed to penetrate that exasperating barrier, she turned apologetically:

"You see, Mis' Webster, I've known Martha Waring ever since we were that high." She indicated an altitude above the floor about equal to that of an ambitious kitten. "She was born in that very house, and I was born in this, and now we're the only ones left of our folks. So it seems like I knew more about her than I did about myself."

It is to be feared that Mrs. Webster, lately come from more impersonal atmospheres to that of Ackerton, made small effort to discourage the revelations which it not seldom befell her to hear. On the contrary, she made it a point to regard them as among the roses which garnish the rather thorny path of young divines and their wives.

"A friendship like that is charming," she remarked. "It is not many that survive the perils of childhood. You are both fortunate in having such constant friends."

"H'm! It's a pity she don't see it!" exclaimed Miss Cockerill somewhat grimly. "Like as not she'll tell Jonas Lane to go back out West."

"Jonas Lane?" echoed Mrs. Webster with diplomatic interrogation. "Mr. Lane? I don't seem to remember that name."

"No, you wouldn't," agreed Miss Cockerill promptly. "His family's all dead, like the rest of ours, and he went away twenty years ago—after he'd proposed to Martha the first time."

"O!" exclaimed Mrs. Webster with discreet noncommittal. But there was that in the regard

she cast upon Miss Cockerill which did not deter that lady from continuing:

"He's only been back twice since. That was when he proposed to her the second and third times. Now I s'pose he's doing it the fourth."

She looked out of the window again, at the house in which so momentous an event should be taking place. The house gave no hint, however, of being the abode of passion. It stood back in its maple-shaded yard, more trim and respectable in its clap-boarded dove-colour than a thing of nature, but as indifferent to human palpitations. The eyes of both ladies devoted to it an interval of silence. Then Miss Cockerill turned once more to her companion:

"I don't see how she can refuse him this time. You see the first time she had her father an' mother and Anne. Her father was real sickly, and Anne took after him. They both lay abed for years. Father Waring did because he fell from the hay loft. But Anne did because her father did, I guess. Anyhow, when Jonas first proposed to Martha, twenty years ago, she said she liked him well enough but that she couldn't leave her folks while they needed her. So Jonas went out West, he was that provoked. He did mighty well, too. He went into lumber, and he's a rich man now. But he didn't forget Martha, for all that. He was always as faithful as you'd want to see—from the time he was a boy and we all went to school together."

Miss Cockerill let her eye return to the dove-col-

oured house with a reminiscent light which quickened Mrs. Webster's interest.

"He asked me to keep him informed of what went on here. He wasn't a great hand at writin', and Martha wasn't either. And so after her father died he came back. She told him she wasn't ready, though. An' 'twas the same when Anne went. Martha said she liked him just as much as ever, and maybe more, but that her duty was with her mother. Jonas said then he'd marry her mother, too. He was always a great hand at his jokes, was Jonas. But Martha said her mother wanted to spend her last days at home, and so Jonas had to go off the third time. Seems like Martha knew her own mind better than most folks."

Again Miss Cockerill paused a moment and contemplated the fateful grey house.

"That was twelve years ago," she resumed. "And it's hardly a fortnight since Mis' Waring was laid in her grave, and here comes Jonas knocking again at Martha's door. Guess she'll have to let him in this time. Anyway, I'll know as soon as anybody. Jonas always promised that he'd tell me first."

It seemed to Mrs. Webster that she found a certain parallel between the decently painted clapboards to which her attention had thus been drawn and the somewhat inscrutable exterior of her hostess. There was more within than appeared on the surface. As for Miss Cockerill, her gaze had an intensity which walls of brass could scarcely have withstood.

And as if the house could keep its secret from her no longer, Jonas Lane suddenly emerged upon the veranda.

"He's coming over now, I do believe!" exclaimed Miss Cockerill excitedly, endeavouring to make the most of the window without appearing from the outside to do so.

Jonas, however, strode down the path, untied his horse, threw the halter into the back of the buggy, got in with much less deliberation than he had got out, and drove rapidly away.

Miss Cockerill watched the buggy until it disappeared in the long elm vista. Then, after another glance at the grey house, she turned to her visitor.

"Well, I declare!" she burst forth. "If she hasn't refused him again!"

II

When Jonas Lane knocked for the fourth time upon Martha Waring's door his expectancy was a quaint blend of eagerness and humour.

"Seems like things look more spruce than they did last time," he thought, eyeing the polished knocker, the panels of the door, the slightly inclined planks of the veranda, and the flagstones of the path running back to the kitchen. "That there hemlock's grown a pile, too. They planted that 'twixt last time and the time before, in place of the old pine that was struck by lightnin'. Marthy never kept me so long though," he murmured impatiently.

Then the edge of the door began receding, very gently; and when it reached a point which might afford the possibility of ingress or egress to a pet animal a lady's head approached the aperture. It was Miss Waring, come to parley through the postern.

"Why, Jonas, is that you?" she exclaimed, a faint glow suddenly brightening her countenance.

"Same old penny!" rejoined that worthy, putting forth his hand.

At the sight of this friendly member Miss Waring enlarged the aperture over which she stood guard and drew her visitor in. Not only was it the proper and Christian thing to do, but she had a disturbing intuition of neighbourly eyes. Closing the door as gently as she had opened it, she led the way into the parlour, raised the shades, and took a seat opposite her suitor.

It must be confessed that while Miss Waring had received no immediate warning of this visit—Jonas being, as Miss Cockerill had intimated to Mrs. Webster, no great hand at writing—she had nevertheless been led by experience to entertain a premonition of Jonas' arrival not long after any change in her own family circle. And on this occasion she was more uncertain of herself than she had ever been. For the last ditch was lost; and now the invader threatened her very person she knew not whether to surrender or to withstand till the last drop of blood. She wished that she had had more time to think.

It was evident that Jonas, too, as he sat twirling his hat and gazing from his hostess to her furniture, felt a little less than his customary assurance.

It was the woman, however, who relieved the situation by uttering:

"I hope you're feeling well, Jonas. You're looking just the same as ever."

"Thank you, Marthy," rejoined her interlocutor. You're lookin' just about the same, too; but I hope you're feelin' different." And before Miss Waring could recover from this bold attack, Jonas went on: "You know I ain't no hand at beatin' about the bush, Marthy. I might as well tell you here and now what I've come for. I guess you know well enough, though, without my tellin'. You've had chance aplenty to learn what it means when I come here. But this time I ain't going away without ye. Be I now, Marthy?"

He rose from his place on the sofa and approached her. But then he stopped, acutely embarrassed. His blind desire for vicinity had no definite intent, and he did not know just what to do. As for Martha, she stretched out her palms like a barrier before her, and gasped:

"O, Jonas! Don't say such things!"

Unexpected as it was, that gave him definiteness. Sitting down beside the lady of his heart Jonas laid a gnarled finger on her knee.

"I know it's kind of unfair to come on ye sudden like, Martha, just after you've lost your mother.

But if anybody kin comfort ye, I'm the man to do it. I just couldn't wait a minute longer. I've waited purty long, Marthy."

Martha brushed away the audacious finger, and covered her face with her hands like a nymph at bay.

"O, don't, Jonas!" she moaned.

Her gentle faun made no further attempt at violence, but looked at her in amazement.

"Marthy!" he groaned: "What do you mean?"

There was that in his voice which at last compelled Martha to reply, haltingly:

"I mean—Jonas—that I—just can't—go back with you!"

Jonas at first could not speak. Then he said gravely:

"You're only jokin' and beatin' about the bush, Marthy. It's the way women folks have. But what's the use of doin' it with me? You can't mean it. Didn't ye always tell me that you liked me real well, and that when there was nothin' to keep ye you'd come?"

Martha so far recovered her composure as to let her hands resume their customary position in her lap; but her cheeks and her voice betrayed the moral stress under which she laboured.

"I know I did, Jonas," she said. "And I meant it. But somehow it seems different, now the time has come. I do like you real well, and I always did. But it seems like I couldn't leave this old house where I

was born and where all my people died, and go off among strangers. I just can't, Jonas!"

With which deliverance she raised a neatly folded handkerchief to her eyes, and held it there. Poor Jonas looked on with the double helplessness of a man before a woman's tears, and of a lover in the face of his mistress's perversities. Of what all this could mean he had not the slightest idea. But he felt ill-used, although a great deference put him in a mood of concession.

"But you promised, Marthy," he said gently. "And how can you live here all by yourself? Who will look out for you?"

"I know I promised, Jonas," tearfully murmured Miss Waring; "and I just hate to go back on my word. But it comes over me now that I oughtn't to have promised—that I never could have done it. You needn't bother about my living alone, though, I've always looked out for people, instead of their looking out for me. I shouldn't know what to do in a strange house, with everything done for me."

For a moment Jonas looked lost. But then he burst out:

"Why, bless your heart, Marthy, that's easy enough to fix! You needn't go away and have people look out for you at all. You can stay right on here, and I'll come and live with you, instead of taking you away, and then you'll still have somebody to look out for!"

At this sudden change of front Miss Waring lowered her flag of truce and looked at the enemy askance.

"What is it, Marthy?" inquired that gentleman anxiously. "Won't that suit ye?"

Evidently Martha had never entertained such a possibility. And of this she presently gave verbal assurance, in a tone of the most doubting.

"I never thought of that, Jonas," she said slowly. "It would seem so odd to live here and have a stranger in the house."

"A stranger, Marthy!" expostulated Jonas piteously. "I, a stranger! And whose fault is it if I'm a stranger to you? But never mind about that," he added hastily. "Just give me a chance, and we'll get acquainted fast enough! Won't ye, Marthy—dear?" He uttered the last word timidly and drew nearer his love.

This lady felt her heart as water within her. Indeed, a little of it exuded from her eyes, to the further confusion and agony of Jonas Lane.

"What is the matter, Marthy?" he cried. "For mercy's sake tell me! Heaven knows I don't want to make you feel bad! I only want to make you happy and to be happy with you—as I've looked forward to for twenty years."

"I know it, Jonas," conceded the lady of his dreams. "And I hate to be like this. But—it would be so odd—so odd! And if you came here I s'pose we'd have to be—married——"

As she paused, plucking at a fold of her skirt, the wondering Jonas broke in:

"I rather guess we'd have to, Marthy."

"O Jonas! Don't!" supplicated Miss Waring with an agonised blush. "I just meant—that I could never go through it—and live."

"How do you mean, Marthy?" inquired Jonas, utterly dazed.

"Why, I mean," explained Miss Waring hesitantly, "that there'd have to be a dress. And I never could go down to the store and ask to see white satin, and buy ever and ever so many yards of it, and take it to Hannah Lee, and tell her to make me up a—a wedding gown. I never could in the world. Everybody would know, and talk, and I couldn't stand it."

"I s'pose they'd have to know," said Jonas apologetically. "There's too much of me to be hid. Is that all?"

"No," pursued Martha, relentlessly implanting another dart in her lover's bosom. "There'd have to be a wedding. And I'll do a good deal for you, Jonas, but I'll never stand up with you before the minister and have everybody whispering about Martha Waring and her old beau Jonas Lane, and how they've got married at last, and it's a pity they didn't do it afore."

"It is a pity, Marthy," admitted the doleful Jonas, "but——"

"That isn't the worst, though," continued Martha, to whom the whole grim scene unfolded itself in

its entirety. "The worst would be the rice. They'd throw it at us when we went away, and the people on the cars would see, and it would stick in our clothes, and roll out wherever we went, and everybody would know, and laugh. O Jonas, I can't! I'm sorry, but I just can't!"

To poor Jonas world within world of undreamt feminine perversity had of a sudden been revealed. He felt as one bound by cobwebs. But, after staring for some moments in silence at his liege lady, he addressed her again the word.

"Marthy Warin'," he asked solemnly, "would you marry me if you could do it without rice, and without a weddin' dress, and without anybody's knowin'?"

She regarded him with doubt.

"Seems like it wouldn't be really getting married," she objected incautiously.

The face of Jonas darkened with despair. After this, what was there to hope? Martha, however, returned shamefacedly to her guns.

"I would though, Jonas, if I could."

"Honour bright, Marthy? Will ye promise?" demanded that gentleman, visibly expanding.

"Why, yes, Jonas, if there was a way," breathed the hunted victim.

"All right," exclaimed the victor cheerfully, rising forthwith. "We'll elope then! And now you've promised, I'm going off to see about it."

With which he departed, before the agitated Miss

Waring had time to protest against the base advantage which had been taken of her defenceless condition.

III

The soul of Miss Cockerill was ground to powder between wrath and desire. The expected had happened, and neither Jonas Lane nor Martha Waring had told her a word about it. Martha Lane, she supposed she'd have to say now. They were ungrateful as owls, she did declare. All the years she'd known them—and Jonas Lane almost as much her beau as Martha's! She didn't know which to be maddest at: Jonas, who had promised to tell her first of anybody in the world, after Martha; or Martha, who had told her everything ever since she was old enough to have anything to tell. But she couldn't live there next door to them and never make a sign. They'd think it queer—well, as they'd all known each other. And it didn't seem as if she could wait to hear about it all. The idea of their running off and getting married like that, and setting everybody to talk!

So, putting her pride in her pocket—a convenience which the modes of Ackerton permitted her—and a shawl over her head, she walked across to Martha's kitchen door.

That lady opened it, beaming consciously.

"Well, Susan! We began to think we'd have to go over and see you first."

Miss Cockerill eyed her hostess curiously. The change in her spiritual condition, however, had apparently wrought no corresponding physical metamorphosis.

"I would have taken it kindly, Martha," rejoined the visitor. "You an' Jonas going off so sudden-like kind o' took my breath away."

If Miss Cockerill succeeded in dissembling the poignancy of her emotions, Mrs. Lane nevertheless found means to detect it.

"I don't wonder, Susan!" exclaimed that matron. "It took mine away, too, and I've hardly got it back yet. But Jonas would have it so." With which interesting information she drew her friend toward the sitting room. "Come in and let's visit a little. I haven't seen you for such a while and dinner isn't in a hurry."

Miss Cockerill looked about her as they went. It seemed to her that events so momentous must leave a mark upon their material surroundings. But the old house looked exactly as she had known it for nearly fifty years. Mrs. Lane observed these glances, and interpreted them in her own way.

"No, he isn't here," she smiled. "There's too much of him to be hid, as he says. He's gone down to the store to do some trading. But let me tell you all about it. It's only fair as you should know, being such an old friend of both of ours." With which the two ladies settled themselves for a long session.

"You see it was this way," began the bride, exam-

ining her apron as if for inspiration. "You know how it always was between Jonas and me."

"Yes," admitted Miss Cockerill inscrutably.

"And you know how I always felt, so long as any of my family were left—that my first duty was with them."

"Yes," repeated Miss Cockerill.

"Well, when Jonas came on this time, so soon after mother's death, he found me all upset. It was the change, I s'pose, and the loneliness, and the having no one to look out for. And when he spoke of taking me away I just couldn't go. So we arranged that he should come here instead. And I can't help being glad it was so. It isn't so hard for him, as 'twould be for me to go 'way out where he lives."

"Where he lived," suggested Miss Cockerill.

Mrs. Lane accepted the amendment with a smile.

"And when we came to talk things over we decided we didn't want any publicity—and I just in mourning, you know." Mrs. Lane noted that this point told. "We didn't know just how to manage, though. Jonas, he was for going before the justice. But I told him as how I wouldn't feel right if I wasn't married by a minister. Then he wanted we should go off somewheres and get married before a strange minister, so as nobody should know till it was all over. Eloping, he called it, like a story book. But I told him I wouldn't have any goings on like novels, and that if I couldn't be married by my own minister I wouldn't be married at all."

"Dear me!" cried Miss Cockerill. "After all the time he's waited! I thought you told him something, though, from the way he left the house the day he came back. I said as much to Mis' Webster. She was with me at the time."

"Is that so? 'Twas Mrs. Webster that finally fixed it up with Jonas. It simply used me up, and he told me to leave it to him and he'd get us married by the minister without any fuss and feathers—or rice," she added.

"How did they do it?" inquired Miss Cockerill.

"Well, I invited the minister and his wife and Jonas in to dinner," answered the bride. "I naturally would have had you, Susan, if I'd had anybody outside. But Mrs. Webster had to know about it, being the minister's wife, and she was really the one that managed, and as long as 'twas that way it seemed a comfort to have some other woman there. I felt awful mean, though, not telling you, Susan."

Whatever might have been the opinions of the lady addressed, she diplomatically concealed them behind a veil of impatience.

"What happened then?" she asked.

"Well, before going to the table, we two stood up in front of Mr. Webster, and he married us. Then we sat down just as if nothing had happened. I was that scared, though, lest somebody should come in before we got to our victuals, that I kept my eye out the window all the time."

"What did you have on?" inquired Miss Cockerill. "You didn't have much time to get things made."

"No, I didn't want to, being in mourning you know. And that Hannah Lee never could hold her tongue, anyway! So I just wore my grey silk, and Jonas said we'd get whatever else we wanted when we were away."

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Cockerill. "And then?"

"And then Mr. and Mrs. Webster went away, carrying my bag with the few things I needed, and Jonas went back to the hotel, and I stayed and did up the dishes."

"What was all that for?" queried Miss Cockerill. "I should think Jonas might ha' stayed with his own wife."

"No, I didn't want he should. People might have thought it strange if they'd come in. And the Websters took my bag because they were going to be in their team down at the end of the garden lot, and I was going out as if to pick chrysanthemums, and they were going to ask me to take a ride with them."

"Why in the world did you have them there?" demanded the intrepid Susan.

"Why, because it was less conspicuous," explained Mrs. Lane. "They'd just been here to dinner and had gone away, and if they'd come back afterwards, it might have looked queer. I wanted it to be as if I saw them by chance like, out back there. Well, after my dishes were all done up, and everything was in

order, and the house locked tight for going away, I went upstairs and got ready. But when the time came it seemed as if I could never go in the world. I just stood at the back door in my things and couldn't budge. 'Twas only the idea of Jonas going off alone by himself in the cars that started me. So I opened the door, very softly, and stepped out as light as I could, and locked it behind me, and made for the garden. I was just sure that you or somebody would see me and call out, and I didn't know what I should say; and I was so scared I couldn't hardly see. I did hear some kind of a noise, too, and that made me run. And I ran so fast I actually fell down, Susan—flat on the ground!"

"My!" exclaimed that sympathetic auditor. "Did you spoil your dress?"

"Pretty near. I was all over dirt when I finally got to the carriage, and so out of breath I couldn't open my mouth, and that nervous I could have cried. I guess I did some, too. But Mrs. Webster just held my hand, and Mr. Webster talked about the weather and the crops and Jonas and everything, as natural as natural. And by and by I perked up. And we had a perfectly lovely ride to West Carthage."

"Jonas met you there then, I s'pose."

"No—or at least not just then. I wouldn't have had him for the world. Such lots of Ackerton folks go to West Carthage."

"Didn't you go away together at all, then?" inquired Miss Cockerill sardonically.

"Why, of course we did!" cried the bride. "Jonas came in on the train. He was to be in the last car but one, sitting in the tenth seat from the back on the right-hand side—away from the station. Well, we got there just a little before time, and nobody could have told who was going. And when the train came in Mrs. Webster kissed me, and Mr. Webster shook hands, and they both said real nice things, and hoped I'd find Jonas all right; and then I got out and got on the car just as it started."

"And did you find Jonas all right?" pursued the quizzical Miss Cockerill.

"You know well enough you don't need to ask that, Susan Cockerill!" exclaimed Mrs. Lane. "You always find Jonas when he says so. He was right there where he said, looking as if he'd just stolen cream."

"I should think he'd ha' been scared when the train started and you wasn't there."

"I don't know. If he was he didn't show it. He just said he was used to waiting for me."

For a moment Miss Cockerill regarded her friend in silence. Then she remarked some what cryptically:

"Well, if I'd known it was as easy as that gettin' married, I'd ha' done it myself!"

SUSANNAH AND THE ELDER

I

THERE was also a Younger.

He had just come down from Florence, where a white umbrella was no longer proof against the August sun, and where even the secular shades of the Uffizi had grown intolerable. But whether Viareggio were an effective substitute was a debatable question. To have sought refuge from the dim-roomed palaces above the Arno in a pink casino required other justification than that of greater security against the attacks of Phœbus, while the charms of a ragged pine wood and of a dubious monument to Shelley hardly threw the scale against the Piazza della Signoria. But there was their Ligurian Sea, as absurdly overcoloured as a lithograph, which one might splash in all day long, whereas in all Tuscany was there scarcely water enough to wet your finger withal. And, too, there were people.

So the Younger stood in the doorway of the Casino terrace and smiled. For while the *Stabilimento*, like all respectable *Stabilimenti*, was rigidly divided into two equal halves, with the dressing-rooms of the sheep on the right hand and those of the goats on the left of the central café, it was noticeable that the

spectators tended to scatter themselves in precisely the opposite sense. What chiefly caused the Younger to smile, however, was that at the extreme right-hand corner table he recognised the back of the Elder. This personage, upon whom time had already impressed a seal only too legible, was what it pleased the Younger to call a type; and in types he conceived that he found a peculiar profit. Since the Elder, despite his worldly degree, was known in Florentine circles for his assiduity among the studios—not so much in the quality of patron of the arts as in that of amateur of the society to be found therein—what could be more in character than his present post? And if the Younger happened to be better acquainted with the back which he now beheld than with its patrician obverse, he found in that circumstance nothing to prevent his edging through the crowd to the extreme right-hand corner table.

"Ah, the long American painter!" cried the Elder, greeting him with the effusion whose secret is alone to the Latin race. "You have come to look for models, eh?" He waved his hand toward the more or less exposed forms disporting themselves on the sands below.

The Younger laughed.

"Your opportunities are limited here," he said. You should go to an American watering-place. There young men and maidens, old men and children, dressed and undressed, sport together with a promiscuity! You would imagine yourself by the waters of Eden."

"*Così?*" The Elder looked up a moment. "But after all, a little formality is better—a little illusion."

"Illusion!" cried the Younger. "In the red and white stripes so bountifully provided by the *Stabilimento!* I can conceive of no surer cure for love than to chain the unhappy victim to this corner and force him to behold his inamorata in the full horror of her dishabille. It would be a disillusionment which no passion could survive."

"On the contrary," rejoined the Elder, "you will shortly behold a vision whose like you might seek in vain beside your waters of Eden."

The Younger laughed again.

"There is already a vision, is there? In red and white stripes? You must be worse off than usual, for this spectacle is positively indecent. It is more. It is revolting. There ought to be a law limiting public bathing to persons between the ages of—say —three and thirty-three, with special clauses excluding individuals of inadequate or intolerable dimensions!"

The Elder laughed in turn.

"That is why I am too vain to expose myself. There is an irrepressible democracy of the flesh which is fatal to the most exclusive triumphs of the tailor. But wait till you see Dulcinea."

"Who is she this time?" inquired the Younger airily.

The Elder turned upon him a reproachful but an unoffended monocle:

"If she were respectable I would marry her to-morrow."

"Ah!" uttered the Younger, slowly. "And are you respectable? Not, of course, that I mean to imply anything against a Marquis of Tuscany."

The Elder dropped his monocle.

"What will you have? Things are like that. Besides, women don't care. In fact they are all the more flattered to have been chosen last. It proves their pretensions."

"O!" grinned the Younger. "And who is the last?"

"Nobody knows. Some say she is a diva from Paris; others that she is a *danseuse* from Vienna; and others— But she is here on some caprice. She is waiting for someone. I have tried to make her think it was for me. I have made eyes. I have smiled. I have sighed. I have wept. I have sent flowers. I have written poems. I have thrown myself in her path. But she does not look. She goes about like anybody. She has her—you know—with her—— an old fat one."

"But how do you know that she is not somebody?" demanded the Younger.

"Wait till you see!" admonished the Elder darkly. "Does anybody *flâne* about alone and refuse to speak? Does anybody wear diamonds in the daytime? Does anybody drag frills from the Rue de la Paix over the sands of the sea? Does anybody come to a hole like Viareggio when they might be at Venice or Scheveningen or Deauville?"

The Younger, highly entertained by this impassioned picture, was on the point of pursuing his inquiries when the Elder evinced a sudden excitement.

"Look!" he whispered, replacing his monocle.

The Younger looked. He saw a woman, extremely young, extremely pretty, extremely self-possessed, and even extremely chic, in her surrender of the red-and-white stripes of Viareggio for a bathing dress more modish, advance slowly toward the water. She was followed by an older lady, who had long since capitulated before the stoutness of middle life.

"Do you see?" cried the Elder. "Can anybody look like that and be respectable?"

"Of course," laughed the Younger. "Why in the world haven't you guessed?"

"Who, pray?" the Elder demanded.

"Why, who but an American?"

"O-o-o! I never thought of that." And in the light of a new hypothesis he began to examine Dulcinea afresh. After a prolonged scrutiny he spoke again: "What do you make of the old one then, on your theory?"

"Why, who should she be but the girl's mother?"

"Do mothers let their daughters go like that — even in America?"

"Like what? Her mother seems to be going farther than she."

"Ah, yes; you haven't seen," rejoined the other. "But I don't believe it," he burst out. "How do you know?"

"How do I know?" mused the Younger. "How could I help knowing—after one look. Blood is thicker than water: an electric sympathy assures me!"

"Yes, an electric sympathy—when it is that one!" grinned the Elder.

"Well, then, look at their hair. Haven't all Americans the same hair?"

The Elder glanced at him.

"You have, it is true. The mixture of races, I suppose. But that is not enough."

"If you absolutely demand conviction, then, I know because they have been pointed out to me in Florence by other Americans."

"Florence!" exclaimed the Elder. "Impossible! I would have seen them."

"My dear Marquis," retorted the Younger, "why should you have seen them? Do I have to inform you that Florence is one of the most considerable American cities on this globe? There are many people in Florence whom you do not see. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that they live there—in a *villino* outside the Porta Romana. I can even tell you that they have no contract for it—so complete in Florence is our knowledge about each other! They came more than a year ago, saying that they were to leave the next day. They have said so every day since; but the landlord is as sure of them as if he had a ten-year lease."

"Who are they, then?" persisted the Elder. "What else do your friends say about them?"

"Who are they! That is the one thing that nobody knows," replied the Younger.

"Ah, I told you they were not respectable!" proclaimed the Elder in triumph.

The Younger was touched in his country's honour.

"My dear sir," he objected warmly, "allow me to inform you that you entirely misconceive the case. I have not the slightest reason to suppose them other than the perfected bloom of respectability. Have you heard of our American inventions? Well, they are one of them—a mother and daughter, unattached. There are thousands in Florence. Rome is full of them. Certain Swiss and German cities contain only enough other inhabitants to lodge, feed, clothe, educate and divert them. In America you meet them on every corner. They have always emerged from some pre-existent, perhaps some inferior state of being, but without scandal; which, of course, is not to say that they are immune from the frailties of the race. But never be deceived by them again."

The Elder smiled. "Must it be always that—a mother and a daughter? Can't there be two daughters? Or another mother?"

"Never," replied the Younger firmly. "If there are, then it's another invention."

"But there must be a man," objected the Elder.

"No," insisted the Younger, "there isn't. There never is. You might ransack the universe and you wouldn't find him. It's like spontaneous combustion—and just as respectable."

The object of this discussion being now indistinguishable in the dazzle of the Mediterranean, the Elder pursued his inquiry.

"If these ladies are of origin and habits so out of the ordinary, do they have names?"

"Rather! They are called Perkins, I believe. The young lady is Susannah. Her mamma is known behind her back as The General."

The Elder repeated these soft appellations to himself. Then he asked:

"What do they do with themselves? Why have I never met them in the world?"

"For the excellent reason that they don't go. They know no one. They see the dressmaker and a few other Americans, and *basta*."

"Ah! There must be something queer!" burst out the Elder. "You haven't told me all. Otherwise how could they help not knowing everybody and going everywhere?"

The Younger let out an exaggerated sigh.

"That is precisely what I have been trying to explain to you," he answered. "But it is true," he added; "I haven't told you all."

"Ah, I knew! What is it?" The Elder was hectic in his eagerness.

"Well," replied the Younger, looking for his effect, "Susannah is one of your literary ladies. She writes a novel. Not novels, you understand, but a novel. Some ladies keep house. Other ladies embroider tea-cloths. A few occupy themselves with dogs, or

reforms. Susannah writes a novel. She is a portentous blue-stocking."

"Blue stocking! On that leg! Never!" exploded the Elder. "I would give a thousand francs to know her!"

The Younger regarded his companion quizzically. "Would you really?"

"O you young men!" cried the Elder. "I don't know what you are made of nowadays. In my time there was more fire. I repeat it—I would give a thousand francs to know her, and it would be nothing."

"All right," smiled the Younger. "I'll take you."

"Take me? Where?" asked the mystified Elder.

"Why, to Susannah—for a thousand francs."

"To Susannah! My poor young man, little you know about it. I have been here a month, and it isn't so easy as you think."

"On the contrary," contradicted the Younger suavely, "it is far easier than you think. I happen to know a good deal about it, for I am personally acquainted with her. I have shaken her hand, I have dined at the *villino*, I——"

"Mother of Heaven!" The Elder furiously clutched his arm. "You know her, and you talk like this! You sit here calmly! You laugh! You lead me by the nose! You——"

Words failed him, and he could only work his fingers into the Younger's muscles.

That young man tasted of his advantage.

"You see in America they are all like that."

"And you are here to say so? Then you are either a monster or a liar."

"Also," continued the Younger placidly, "you must remember that I am a poor devil of an artist, while Susannah——"

"Ah, I will marry her yet!" cried the Elder with a new enthusiasm. "Take me! Take me!"

"To Susannah, you mean? For a thousand francs? I will. But wait till she comes out of the water."

II

If Susannah and her mother were an American invention, the Younger began to take as much pleasure in them as if he had invented them himself. And indeed, in a way, he had. Hitherto his acquaintance with them had been less cordial, if anything, than his acquaintance with the Elder. If Susannah had maintained an armed truce, as it were, because they were both strangers in a strange land, he had cultivated Susannah merely as a type. There was a lack, all around, of personalities. But now that he had lightly thrown Susannah to the lions he experienced a more particular interest in her case. He promised himself from the reaction of his two types some such entertainment as one might expect from the encounter of an irresistible force with an immovable obstacle.

He was not long re-established in Florence before the Elder repaired one day to the Younger's studio.

"It is all arranged," he announced importantly. "I am going to marry her."

The Younger, it must be confessed, was a little surprised that Susannah should have fallen so soon. But he kept his guard.

"My dear marquis, let me congratulate you! Have you set the day?"

"O, the details have yet to be arranged. But I have spoken to her mother."

A light began to break upon the Younger.

"And The General is favourable?"

"The General is favourable—most favourable. She could not be favourable enough."

I have not explained that Susannah's parent, in virtue of a striking resemblance to the Father of her Country, and of certain military qualities which she possessed, was known among her fellow exiles as The General.

"I hope Susannah was equally favourable," the Younger lightly threw out.

"She was not there. But after the mother has given her assurance——"

The Younger began incontinently to laugh.

"My poor marquis! Didn't you know?"

"Know what?" demanded that nobleman uneasily.

"That the mother has nothing to do with it?"

"How has she nothing to do with it? She has everything to do with it. Isn't Susannah her daughter?"

"I have no reason to suspect the contrary. But in our country—you know——"

"Well, what about this extraordinary country of yours?"

"Why, in our country"—the Younger put it as gently as he could—"we don't ask the mother."

"What in the world do you do then? Is it like the Rape of the Sabines, *par exemple!* Do you ride in and carry them off?"

"O, not a bit! Sometimes they ride in and carry us off. But we—we are more discreet. We go in very softly and ask them if they'll come."

"Without waking the mother up? I see! It's another invention." The Elder was visibly annoyed.

"Come!" cried the Younger: "You needn't be so fierce. I didn't invent it. You had better be congratulating yourself that The General didn't gobble you up on the spot—for herself."

The marquis looked very blank.

"Then I have done nothing?" he asked at last.

"*Caro marchese,*" began the Younger soothingly, "to have gained a friend is always to have done something. It is very well to have The General on your side. It will make her all the more amenable when you come to the matter of settlements. For I must warn you before it is too late that——"

"What?" The Elder braced himself as for another blow.

"That we don't make settlements."

It was as if suddenly the Elder had seen a mountain slide into the sea.

"What the devil do you make then?"

"We," replied the Younger with a particular inflection, "make love!"

"Oh!" ejaculated the Elder.

And he turned on his heel.

III

He let several suns go down on a certain stiffness which he felt toward his young adviser. But that it was no more than a stiffness was proven by his eventual reappearance. The Younger in the meantime was more or less in the dark as to the progress of events. He knew that there was no break as yet; but his previous acquaintance with Susannah and The General had not been such as to entitle him to their confidences. He was accordingly much pleased when the Elder came back.

"This time I am ready for you," observed that worthy. "And I might add that she is ready for me."

The Younger's intentions had been of the best; but if you make a pass at a fencer his wrist will spring instinctively into play.

"Which one?" he inquired, with a smile.

"Do you ask?" retorted the Elder.

"I stand corrected. Of course, you will have to take them both. Have they given their word?"

"Ah—do you mean that the old one will be hard

to shake off?" put the Elder, with something less of assurance.

"Not at all. I mean that neither of them can be shaken off. It is a particularity of the case. It is like the Siamese twins. Whoever takes one, takes both. It is the one case of plural marriage tolerated in my country."

"In that case," rejoined the Elder unperturbed, "there will be no trouble about the settlements."

The Younger took his pink with a laugh. "Then you have been making the other thing. Have you asked her yet?"

"No. But it comes to the same. I have sounded her."

"O! And she rang true? How did you manage it?"

The Elder took his step without a tremour. "I offered her a present and she accepted it."

The Younger left him an instant in his security.

"Yes? What was it?"

"An antique pendant. At this moment it is hanging against her heart."

The Younger took this picture in, but he repressed a laugh.

"My dear marquis, you might give her seventy-three pendants, and I presume her heart is large enough to hang all of them against it. But that would prove nothing."

The Elder looked reproach before he proffered it:

"You assure me she is respectable. How can she

receive presents from a man, how can her mother allow her to receive presents, unless she means something?"

"Perfectly well," laughed the Younger irritatingly.

"And is that another, may I ask, of your famous inventions?" put the Elder with some irony.

"It is perhaps the most famous of all," replied the younger, without a qualm. "We are a philosophic people. We take what comes, whether it be diamonds or bankruptcy."

"Yes, but young girls!" burst out the Elder. "Can they take diamonds and keep their characters?"

"Perfectly well! What have diamonds to do with character? The young girls do not attach the exaggerated importance to material things which you do here. They receive necklaces, tiaras, stomachers, as the merest natural tribute to their charms, and as simply as they would receive wild flowers. It means nothing."

The Elder gasped.

"And would they be capable of refusing one after that?"

"Perfectly."

"*Madre di Dio!* What a society! What taste! What——" He could say no more. But even in the rapids he felt that the Younger was the only one to pilot him ashore. "Do you positively mean to tell me, then, that I am nowhere?"

The Younger relented a little.

"Of course I cannot read the secrets of Susannah's

heart. For all I know you may be enshrined within its inmost recess. I only tell you that the pendant, by itself, means nothing."

The Elder looked lost.

"Do I accomplish nothing, then, by what I have done?"

"Only," improvised the Younger briskly, "by following it up. A pendant is very well, but it is not enough. You see, in America anybody might give her a pendant—the plumber, the ice-man, the undertaker. You must do more. You must offer solid proofs of your state of heart. You must find out what Susannah wants. If it is something which can be made to order, into which you can put something of yourself, all the better. Then she will know that you are in earnest, and will act accordingly."

The Elder took it seriously—not in a pique, but as under the enlarging influence of new ideas.

"I have heard her speak of something," he uttered slowly, interrogatively.

"What was it?"

"Do you remember those door knockers at Palazzo Testadura? Bronze? By Benvenuto Cellini?"

"The Neptune, you mean?"

"Yes. She said she wished they had them at the *villino*. They have nothing but an iron finger or something, you know. I could have them copied—by way of a beginning."

"Yes!" cried the Younger in a final burst of inspiration. "And to give the personal note, to suggest

delicately the idea of your knocking at her door, you could have the Neptune's head modeled after your own!"

IV

Thus it came about that the genetic word was spoken. To stop its effect was now beyond the power of man. Thenceforward it remained for the Younger only to stand by and admire his handiwork.

Events were by no means slow in materialising. The Elder quickly reported on the knockers. Melconi, the sculptor, had taken a cast and was to remodel the head in accordance with the Younger's suggestion. The prospective donor was already engaged upon a sequence of sonnets—in the manner of Petrarch, he said—to accompany the gift. In the meantime he had ascertained that Susannah would not draw a tranquil breath until she possessed a certain heraldic shield, an old stone coat-of-arms which hung high above the street on the corner of a house across the Arno. He had accordingly entered into negotiation with the owner of the house, had acquired for a fabulous sum the shield in question and had borne it in triumph to the expectant Susannah.

This was but the beginning. The Younger no longer needed to offer suggestions. The Elder's own imagination was fertilised, and now that he knew how ladies were wooed in America he purposed to win Susannah. That young woman expressed no fleeting fancy which her admirer did not at once

embody for her in some form of art. She could not look with favour on the moon but that the marquis would run to order of his jeweller a replica of that heavenly orb, in material far more precious than the original. He could think only in terms of the idea which the Younger had implanted in his mind. The door of the *villino* swung unceasingly to messengers from the goldsmith, the dealer in antiques, the florist, the pastry cook. Even the upholsterer went, and to all was displayed an equal hospitality.

At this the Younger began to feel a secret irritation. He was amused. He was gratified to find his types turn out so typical. But it seemed to him they overdid it. He had not really supposed that Susannah was so bad as that. It verged on the scandalous. Unless—but it could mean only one thing.

Matters, however, proved not to be so simple, after all. There came a day when the Elder entered the studio in a state of mind more perturbed than any he had yet betrayed.

"She has refused me," he called out. "What do you think of that?"

The Younger did not know what to think of it. While, on the one hand, he could not restrain a certain gratification at Susannah's discernment, he deprecated, on the other, her amazing course with regard to the presents. But the Elder left him no time to muse.

"And what do you suppose she said?" he continued excitedly. "She said she wasn't sure how much I

really cared for her. How much! She holds out her hand for everything I bring and then she agreeably withdraws it when she sees nothing more. After I have made myself the talk of the town!"

"Well, you know what I told you,, remarked the Younger, who was much at sea. "Did you expect to bribe her?"

"Yes, I know what you told me. And I know what to think of such people."

The Younger shrugged his shoulders.

"If that is the way you take it, I begin to think Susannah is right."

The Elder threw him a look.

"But what does she want?" he cried, clasping his hands dramatically in the air. "What does she want that I can't give her? What is she now, compared to what she would be as my wife?"

The Younger examined his finger nails.

"You have already had some opportunity to learn that an American girl is the most unfettered creature in the universe. She may think it more amusing to stay so than to become an Italian marchioness."

"I thought you said they were respectable—your famous *jeunes filles,*" exclaimed the Elder sarcastically.

The Younger shrugged his shoulders.

"At any rate she won't stay *jeune* forever. And what is she now, compared to what she would become? She is nobody, whereas my wife——" A handsome gesture left the Younger to figure that

personage. "Then she evidently finds the attractions of this country superior to the rather problematical ones—if you will pardon me!—of her own. She says every day she is going, but she never goes."

"Well, she is at least free to go. And you must remember that America is gilded with the associations of an unbitted youth. There is but an open door between her and an iridescent dream. When Europe has no more to offer her champing spirit she has but to step back into that happy hunting-ground of the *jeune fille*. Whereas with you—the door would close behind her."

The Elder put this from him with a twist of head and hand. "Excuse me, *caro mio*, if I seem to allude to personal matters. But you will remember that at Viareggio, that first time, you attributed something of your own coolness to—to the fact——"

"Of being a pauper?" filled out the Younger cheerfully. "Yes."

"Well, if I must say it, she could do much worse than to marry me. Doesn't she know?"

"That is true," admitted the Younger, studying his nails anew. From another these facts somehow came with less grace. So he contented himself with adding: "But she might also do better."

"How?" interrogated the Elder, turning savagely upon him. "What more, I ask you, can a respectable girl want? In God's name, what more?"

The Younger suddenly knew that he approved

enough of Susannah's discernment to suspend judgment upon her bad taste.

"Perhaps what you call 'respectability,' for one thing," he suggested. "And for another——" He pulled up. "Yet she has that already. So why should she want it?"

"What?" demanded the Elder. "I will give her whatever she wants. What is it?"

The way in which he shouted it made the Younger look out of the window.

"Youth," he replied.

There was a silence. There was such a silence that the Younger knew he had been a fool. He turned around with the intention of smoothing things over a bit, and the look which he caught on the Elder's face deepened his pang.

But the marquis, giving him no time, passed it off.

"Eh, my young friend, you have hit it on the head. But never mind. I have not made myself the talk of the town for nothing. And Miss Susannah shall find it out. I will go on as I have begun. I will pay her such attention, I will give her such presents, that even she—even she—will find that she is compromised. Then I will tell you whom she will marry."

And with this delicate intimation he stalked away.

V

This was how it came to the Younger that more might lie in experiments than one foresaw. He did not like at all that insinuation that the marquis

would catch Susannah by foul means if not by fair. But, however he might dislike the Elder's tactics, the Younger felt his own share of the responsibility.

The two men met one morning at the gate of the *villino*—the Younger going in, the Elder coming out. They exchanged ceremonious salutations, as usual.

"I have just brought the knockers," said the latter. "I am much obliged for that clever suggestion of yours. The head is a speaking likeness."

The Younger smiled uncomfortably.

"Yes? And what does our young lady think of them?"

"She is very pretty. She says they are too charming to put out here on the door. She must keep them by her."

The Younger stepped inside and slammed the gate in the other's face. Could a spectator then have seen both sides of the wall he would have observed each gentleman, very red, contemplating for a moment the closed door. He would finally have beheld them turn and walk away—the Elder slowly, shrugging his shoulders; the Younger in haste, his head held high.

He found Susannah in the *sala*, laughing over the obnoxious knockers. The sight of it angered him the more.

"My dear young lady," he cried out, "you have made a fool of yourself long enough. You must go home."

Susannah stopped laughing, for very surprise. She examined the flushed Younger curiously, as if he had been a strange beast in a cage.

"Why," she said, "what is the matter with you? Do you feel ill? Shall I ring for Gilda?"

The Younger flung his hat into a chair.

"I do feel ill! You and the marquis make me ill between you!"

"Oh, the marquis!" Susannah glanced at the knockers and smiled. "Yes, I remember. You introduced the marquis to me. Didn't you?"

"Yes," he snapped. "That's why I'm here now."

She laughed.

"What funny creatures men are! They never think of things beforehand. And they said you were clever."

"I never told you so," he retorted rather dully. "You'd better wait till you get things from headquarters."

"So had you," she rapped out. "Who told you I was making a fool of myself?"

"Nobody! Nobody needed to! What under the sun do you mean by filling your house with his truck?"

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Susannah hotly. "You don't care anything about us!"

"What if I don't? I care about seeing my country made a scandal."

Susannah again looked at him curiously a moment.

"O! If you are so patriotic I wonder you don't go home yourself. Wouldn't that be the easiest way out of your—" she smiled—"your troubles?"

"No! That wouldn't stop anything. I want things stopped. I want you to go."

"Well, well!" she exclaimed. "You *are* in a hurry all of a sudden. It seems to me that you ask a good deal of people you have done so little for—though perhaps you have done a good deal. Is that all?"

"No!" he cried. "Since you ask, I want you to send him back all these things—every single one of them."

She looked at him more curiously still.

"What! All these pretty things! Why, we're only just beginning to get comfortable. And see! He just brought me something else."

She held up the knockers, as if they had been two dolls. The Younger shrugged his shoulders and walked to the end of the room.

"What are you going to do?" he suddenly threw at her. "Are you going to marry him?"

She laughed softly.

"Him? O no! No! And I don't even think he really wants me to. It's a sort of game, you see," she added, with a confiding seriousness.

"*Dio mio!* I do see. I have seen for a good while. How long are you going to keep it up?"

"I don't think you really deserve to know," she said, with her head on one side. "But since you ask, and since you began it, I will tell you." She assumed

an air of great mystery. "I'm going to keep it up till he brings me the gold salt cellars!"

He stared at her. But she faced him out. And when he walked away to a window she threw him a question in turn.

"Now that I've told you what you wanted to know, will you tell me something?"

"What is it?" He faced partly about.

"Just how did the game begin? What did you tell him, I mean? You see, his—his manners—were so different before you came and after."

The Younger laughed curtly.

"I told him you were respectable."

At this he looked out of the window again.

"Oh—respectable," said Susannah behind him. "You told him I was respectable? That was very kind of you—I'm sure." And then the Eternal Feminine came out with a sob. "You horrid man! You perfectly horrid man! You're just——"

She flounced out of the room.

VI

The Elder stood at the gate of the *villino*. It was a post familiar enough to him, and the particular object upon which his eyes rested was scarcely less so. But the juxtaposition was unusual. For the panel before him was embellished by that replica of Benvenuto's knocker, to which reference has already so frequently been made. What manner of omen could it be? He studied the knocker. He studied the

door. And finally it occurred to him to apply the one with some vehemence to the other.

In response to this overture a flip-flap of slippers clattered across the flagging within, and the door was opened by Gilda in person. Again the Elder wondered. For hitherto the door, obeying some secret impulse, had betrayed no hint of human agency. The maid, however, left him no time to parley:

"*O signor marchese!* The ladies have gone to America. Did he forget?"

"*Diavolo!*" ejaculated that personage.

"Yes, about a quarter of an hour ago. They said they told him they were going, but in case he forgot and came again—the *marchese* has made such a habit!—to let him know they were leaving by the Genoa train, at eleven. There is still time."

The Elder looked at his watch.

"Is there still time?" he uttered slowly. He stared at the sea god who so splendidly brandished in his own image the trident before his eyes.

"If the *marchese* hastens," replied the interested Gilda. "My *padrona*——"

But the Elder quenched her with a silver *lira* and strode away. Even after he had ordered a cabman to hurry him to the station, though, he did not really believe he would go in. Indeed, by the time he reached the station he was quite sure he would not go in. That would be too—— Yet he jumped out of the carriage before it stopped, and ran through to the platform. He would just find out! And he

charged into the arms of the Younger, who was strolling up and down with a cigarette.

"It is true, eh?" asked the Elder, collecting himself against this new surprise. For the moment it escaped him that he and the Younger were no longer on the best of terms.

"It looks like it," replied the other. "Shall I take you to the compartment?"

The Elder did not answer. But he followed his companion, replacing his monocle on the way; and presently, in all truth, he beheld Susannah and The General enthroned amid mountains of luggage.

"Why, we began to think you weren't coming!" cried Susannah, smiling out of the window. "That would have been a nice way to treat us!"

The Elder made an extravagant bow.

"If you give no hint——"

Susannah laughed. "No one ever got so many hints. We have told you every day. We told you yesterday."

The Elder passed it off with a shrug.

"How soon may we expect you back?"

Susannah shook her finger out of the window.

"Never! We are through with Europe."

"O!" The marquis laughed. "And how about America?"

"Dear me!" cried Susannah. "There's no comparison!"

"So I have understood!" exclaimed the Elder gaily, glancing at the Younger.

"I don't think you understand well enough, though," objected Susannah. "You don't seem to understand that, after all, people make more difference than things. And the people there are different. It isn't just that they don't act like monkeys the first time they see you on the beach. It isn't that they aren't taken in so easily, and that they don't make such fools of themselves. They are nicer. They are kinder. They have some decency and some self-respect."

She quite lost her climaxes in her haste to get it out, and in her smile there was something very pointed.

As for the marquis, he again made a profound bow.

"They are very superior beings, I am sure. But you seem to have been some time in coming to this conclusion."

Susannah's head dropped a little to one side.

"Not so long as you might think," she said. "I reached it at Viareggio, last summer."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the marquis. "And may one ask how, with such a weight upon your mind, you succeeded in deferring your departure so long?"

"Why, yes! And what is more, I will tell you. I was waiting to furnish the *villino*. It wasn't quite complete, you know, until the other day. Did I tell you," she asked, turning to the Younger, "that the marquis had given me the loveliest little gold salt cellars?"

"Your furniture will be much admired in your American home," remarked the Elder pleasantly.

"O dear no!" cried Susannah. "I wouldn't have anything in my American home to remind me of Europe. We have left the *villino*, just as it stands, to the new tenant."

"Ah! You must have got something very handsome for so completely equipped an establishment—even to gold salt cellars," exclaimed the Elder, with an amiable smile.

"Perhaps I might have," replied Susannah; "but the new tenant could scarcely have afforded that."

"And may I ask who the happy man may be?" inquired the Elder, with perhaps a shade of interest.

"O, it isn't a man at all," said Susannah. "It's our maid, you know—Gilda. She has been so good —the one good person in Europe, I believe. We bought the house for her, and took the trouble to have a complete inventory put in the deed—down to the door-knockers—so that there might be no misunderstanding about it."

Whatever the Elder might have had for that was spoiled by the guard, who hurried toward them, locking the compartment doors. Turning to the Younger the Elder took his arm.

"Well," he said, "it seems to me that we are forsaken!"

He was admirable. He had never been so admirable. The Younger, however, gently disengaged himself.

"Pardon me. I am sorry to seem rude, but—I am going, too."

And he made for the door before the guard should lock it.

"*Par-ten-za!*" shouted that functionary, with energy.

The two young people stood together at the window, looking down at the Elder. For an instant the Younger's heart smote him. But something from the eyes nearer his own hardened him again to the cruelty of youth.

"O, by the way," he called, as the train jolted into motion: "Don't forget! You owe me, you know, a thousand francs!"

THE EMERALD OF TAMERLANE*

"O YOU cynical man!" cried the lady from Pittsburgh. She had wattles, and a jewelled lorgnette through which she made me aware of the disadvantage under which we suffered in that day and generation who went about the world without shoulder-straps. She leaned forward a little in order to obtain a better view of those worn by Mrs. Maturin's General.

"Heavens!" I protested. "Do you think me as young as that? A cynic is a doggish person, who snarls. Now I may be a dog, but at bottom I am as sentimental as a school-girl. At the same time I can't help noticing that people are very seldom of one piece. And I understand them better if I put together, or take apart, the different pieces. Besides, what people do is not often important. What may be important are their reasons for doing it. Don't you think?"

She didn't. A waiter, bearing away her oyster shells, widened the breach between us. Across it the lady from Pittsburgh confided to me that her husband, also without shoulder-straps, who sat at the left of our hostess, was in his quiet way working for

* Written in collaboration with John Taylor.

Uncle Sam. I asked myself if her phrase did not perhaps contain an unnecessary preposition. For although half an hour before I had never heard of her, I had heard of him. He was one of those gentlemen so plentiful in Washington just then, full of good advice for the Government, and a little uneasy lest their particular good thing be looked into by some inquisitive commission. What his particular thing was I am too discreet to mention; but it was good enough to keep his wife's wattles in the pink, not to say the purple, of condition, and to set them off by a quite rococo display of diamonds. They confirmed me anew in an old persuasion of mine that a diamond is a stone for a chambermaid—and not for those rare members of that oppressed profession who are as good as gold.

I should say for the lady from Pittsburgh that this reflection probably came to me because fate, generally readier with a surprise than with a piece of good fortune, had put at my other side the famous Miss Sanderson—or the famous Mrs. Maturin, as she is now. She had in her hair some of those perfect emeralds which are the only jewels she ever wears. She explains that she has to, because she was born in May and because a romantic parent took it into his head to name her Esmeralda. Her explanation would be less convincing if the same individual had not bequeathed her a *dot* as melodramatic as her name. Who bequeathed her that aureole of smouldering bronze hair—of the kind you read about in the

short-story magazines, but never see—it is not for me to say. In such cases one usually suspects the beauty doctor. But no beauty doctor could achieve that ivory skin, or those grey-green eyes which—Well, they were so much more lyric than I remembered that I myself could almost break out in the most approved magazine manner about moonlit pools in mountain forests, etc. So if the lady from Pittsburgh considered me an ill-natured dog, I counted myself a lucky one, after all. Not that Mrs. Maturin is witty, or rich in recondite stores of gossip. But then, she needs no such adventitious attractions. She has only to enter a room to have all eyes rest upon her with the tranquil pleasure that is given, say, by an orchid in an old silver-gilt vase.

In furtively giving myself that pleasure, amid the chatter about food conservation which went on above a delicious terrapin soup, it amused me to recall the last time I had seen Mrs. Maturin, there on the other side of the world—Miss Sanderson as she was then. Whereupon she suddenly paid me the compliment of turning away from her General long enough to say in a low voice:

"I got it, you know. I'll tell you about it when I get a chance. I haven't forgotten that I really owe it to you. And it gave me Peter."

At the moment I was dull enough to wonder what she meant. For I had imagined that her fortune had given her Peter. But as she turned back to the General she bent forward a little toward Peter, across

the table, and I saw his eyes light up as they looked for hers. It was pretty to see, at that table where diamonds lit up double chins and pouched eyes from which all fire had long since faded. And no fortune could have bought that. It simply is not in the market.

Even as I told myself so, however, Peter's expression changed so abruptly, as he caught me looking at him, with so little of pride and triumph in his eye, that I could not help asking myself if I had misread his radio message. Was it conceivable that any dramatic complication of the human comedy could lie in wait among the lights and flowers of so polite a dinner-party? At any rate, nothing but an S. O. S. could have the passion of Peter's look, if it were not such a look as I first fancied. Yet why on earth should Peter be going down with all on board—now, at our comfortable Shoreham, in our safe Washington, before the lovely eyes of his well-dowered Esmeralda? And if by any chance he was, what could she do to save him?

I paid for these untimely and fantastic ruminations by finding that the lorgnette of the lady from Pittsburgh was no longer turned in my direction. It now glittered upon young Rodman of the Intelligence Service, at her right, who had been the means of her making that ever delightful discovery with regard to the smallness of the world. At my left Beauty and Valour were already deep in the war. As for myself, whom fate has seen fit to withhold from the paths of

glory, and upon whom two great ladies now turned a sufficiently unflattering pair of backs, I was not too piqued to be grateful for a moment in which to turn over the case of Peter and Mrs. Peter.

Yes, Mrs. Maturin was right. I suppose I had, after all, given her Peter. At any rate, I had accidentally set in motion the series of events that ended in so eugenic a marriage. I have lived long enough, however, to learn that it is never safe to say where a series of events has ended. And knowing Peter far far better than I knew his wife, I could not help wondering whether the condition of equilibrium which had been arrived at were a stable one. Still, there had been that look across the table. And larger fortunes than Mrs. Maturin's have been spent on objects less worthy than Peter. He was young: I fancy a little younger than his Esmeralda. He was tall and well made. He was very nearly as good-looking in his way as she was in hers. He was no fool, either. He could ride, he could shoot, he could play every imaginable game—though somehow he could never carry off the stakes. And he was enough of an engineer, or a mineralogist, or whatever an oil-man needs to be, for an English company to send him out to Persia, of all places, to tap rocks and drill holes for their dark operations. The only thing was— Well, I wondered whether he would prove completely satisfactory as a husband. But then, perhaps it is not the truly good young man who is most adored.

Peter, when I met him in Tehran, seemed by no means one of the truly good. I do not say it in disparagement; for I have noticed, in this ironic world, that the truly good seem as capable of making a botch of their own and other people's lives as the rest of us, while the prodigal son appears to enjoy an undue share of immortality. Be that as it may, the sight of Peter across the table, chatting with the Honourable Miss Windham, brought it incongruously back to me that the first time I ever saw him was much later in the evening than this, between the shafts of a pre-historic victoria which he, together with a young Russian attaché and a couple of youths whom I took to be Telegraph, was trundling down the Lalazar, as it were the Pennsylvania Avenue of Tehran, with every sign of enjoyment. Who was in the victoria I don't know. Certainly not Mrs. Maturin, then.

I afterward heard— in those places, you know, one hears everything about everybody—that although theoretically prospecting for oil among the mountains of Kurdistan, he was for the moment *persona non grata* in that temperamental land, where his investigations had included the wearers of veils. However, he was distinctly *persona grata* with M. Godet, the French hotel-keeper, who does so much for the local colour of Tehran. While there are a good many young men there, what with the Legations, the Bank, the Telegraph, and what not, and while between one estate and another are there great gulfs

fixed, in the most approved metropolitan manner, the young men vastly outnumber the young women of their own sort or of any other sort, for that matter. And there are fewer things for them to do than in larger and less exotic capitals. They therefore give themselves with the more zest to such simple distractions as may be found in any mining-camp. And one of their favourite distractions is to sack M. Godet's hotel. M. Godet takes these periodical devastations very philosophically. I suspect, in fact, that he rather counts on them—in a country where travellers are rare and of the less pecunious, if of the more adventurous, sort, such as military men, rug-buyers, missionaries, and music-hall artists. As for the young men, certain among them are mortgaged to M. Godet for life. It is quite a recognised institution of Tehran. The Legation, or the Bank, or the Telegraph, goes bond for its particular young man, and he goes without everything but pilau enough to keep him at his desk until he is square with M. Godet. Peter, being an outsider, might have fared more hardly if I had not been foolish enough, as a fellow-countryman, to sign my name to a certain scrap of paper drawn up between him and M. Godet. True, the wisdom of my folly had very soon been proved by the tearing up of that scrap of paper, not long after Peter's departure, by M. Godet himself. But the transaction enlightened me not a little on such topics as the budget of the Hôtel de Paris, the price of glass in Persia, etc. For Peter, they said, when

he became a little exalted, cried out for air, and he never could wait to open the windows. He preferred to pitch the furniture at them. He never killed any body who happened to be passing below.

So you see there were reasons for my liking Peter. There was something honest and human about him. We all have impulses to throw furniture, but not many of us have the courage of our convictions. Still, I had never dreamed that Peter would turn out so much the hero of a fairy-tale as to marry the miraculous Miss Sanderson. She turned up in Tehran, too, a year or two after the war broke out, with a French maid and a mongrel Caucasian courier. The war had caught her in Vladikavkaz, Kisliavodsk, one of those watering-places in the Caucasus. She had stayed on in Russia, waiting for the war to stop, till she made up her mind that the longest way around was the shortest way home. And she sailed into the Legation one day, with a letter from the Embassy at Petrograd, desiring to be presented at court and to be shown the Peacock Throne.

It is hard to deny the requests of beautiful ladies. The requests of Miss Sanderson were peculiarly impossible, because, in the first place, ladies are not presented at court in Persia, as they are in more modern monarchies, and because, in the second place, there happens to be no Peacock Throne. There was one once, with a history as wonderful as its canopy of jewelled peacocks, of which there remains nothing but a doubtful modern fragment. And there is now

another, whose name refers not to its decoration, but to a certain Madam Peacock who adorned the harem of Fat'h Ali Shah. These facts were set forth at considerable length, many years ago, in his important work on Persia, by Lord Curzon of Kedleston. But if every other traveller always demanded a sight of the Peacock Throne, and always went away doubting our account of the matter, how could eyes so romantic as those of Miss Sanderson be expected to waste themselves on the closely printed and none too thrilling pages of an ex-Viceroy of India? So I contented myself by pointing out to Miss Sanderson that the Peacock Throne had not been visible since the coronation of young Ahmed Shah, and that Tehran was full of dark rumours as to its having been sold, together with many other magnificent things belonging to the Persian crown. In the third place, however, the requests of the lovely Esmeralda were in particular impossible because of the moment which she chose for making them. It was the moment when the rivers of German gold poured out in Persia had begun to produce their effect. The Holy War had been preached, the banks in the south had been looted, the gendarmes had gone over to the enemy after their Swedish officers, the battle of Kengaver had been fought, and Kermanshah and Hamadan had been taken by the Turks. Even in Tehran things were beginning to look very funny. I therefore urged Miss Sanderson to return to Russia while she could

and get home via Sweden or Siberia. As for going to India by way of the Gulf, it was out of the question.

All the same, she did it! Impossible, I suppose, is a word not to be found in the dictionaries of lovely ladies who all their lives have seen the most obdurate doors fly open before them. And this lovely lady evidently had her share of the resolution, or of a certain indifference to the realities of life, for which her sex is noted. Not that she took anybody into her confidence—except Peter. Him she also took with her, to the vast amusement of Tehran, for whom the fantasies of the American virgin upon her travels are still more or less a novelty. The gossip was that she had discharged her courier and taken Peter on instead. Everybody knew that poor Peter was hard up. At any rate, I happened to know that he and Miss Sanderson had never heard of each other until I introduced them, shortly before they disappeared. And that introduction was merely an accident. On such careless threads do hang the destinies of men!

As I considered it, eyeing the correct and opulent Peter, who now looked secure against the accidents of life, I had to scratch my head to recall just how we had turned so successful a trick, Providence and I. Oh, yes: an emerald, of course. Miss Sanderson had not taken me very seriously at first, and had gone over my head to the Chief and then to the Russians. She had letters to them, too. But a few days later,

when I ran across her at the French Legation, she said she had about made up her mind to take my advice. Persia was too disappointing, what with the dirt and the ugliness and the discomfort and the obstacles everybody put in the way of her seeing the sights, if there really were any. She had even been unable to find anything in the Bazaar.

I explained to her that in Persia nobody goes shopping in bazaars, if antiques were what she was after. The only thing was to get hold of a go-between, a sort of broker who has ways of getting into Persian houses and of getting out the treasures some of them contain.

"Then find me one," she promptly recommended.

It appeared that she didn't want rugs or tiles or miniatures or any of the other things that most people take from Persia. She wanted an emerald, and a much better one than she had seen in the shops. It was then that I first heard of her fancy for emeralds. She had one that belonged to Marie Antoinette. She had another that came from the magnificent collection of Abd-ül-Hamid. Why shouldn't she have a third out of the treasury in Tehran—if the Shah's jewels were really being sold? If I wouldn't show her the Peacock Throne, I might at least get her a go-between. The notion seemed to tickle her enormously, and she refused to be frightened by my warnings that she would have to keep her eyes very wide open and pay any number of commissions without knowing it, including a good fat one for me.

So it was that I handed her over to Peter. Not that Peter was the go-between. The go-between was a picturesque character known in Tehran as the Adorner of the Monarchy. The Adorner of the Monarchy, otherwise one Yeprem Khan, is really an Armenian, I believe. Just how he came to merit his flowery Persian title I cannot say—unless by virtue of his decorative beard, which he dyes purple with henna. Or perhaps it is because out of his back shop in Tiflis, which is his true headquarters, come most of the Rhages jars which adorn the collections of Europe and America. At any rate, the Adorner of the Monarchy is one of the greatest artists and most unmitigated rascals in Asia. There is very little in the way of Saracenic antiquities which the old scarecrow cannot turn out of that mysterious back shop of his in Tiflis, though he specialises in pre-Sefevian pottery. The only trouble with it is that some of it is genuine. For in that sort of thing the Adorner of the Monarchy has the scent of a bloodhound. And he sticks that sanguine beard of his into every corner of western Asia where there may be battle, revolution, or sudden death, seeking what he may devour. Wherefore, I suppose, did he happen to be there in Tehran when we wanted him.

Of course if it had been something really nice Miss Sanderson was after, like an eleventh-century bowl or a miniature by Behzad, she would have been a lost woman. As it was, she knew a good deal more about emeralds than the Adorner of the Monarchy.

I could as easily have conceived him taking an interest in Mission furniture. The point was that those clairvoyant eyes of his, as black and deep as Avernus, yet humourously three-cornered, could find anything for anybody. They even say he was the one who found that French countess for Prince Salar-es-Somebody. However, for extra precaution I called in Peter. There were half a dozen obvious enough reasons why he was a better man for Miss Sanderson's affair than I, the most important being that I had something else to think about just then than trinkets for beautiful ladies. Things had already been looking rather funny behind the scenes in Tehran. They got funnier until that day when the fat little Shah was stopped in the nick of time from running away to Isfahan and the Germans. His valuables had gone, his bodyguard had gone, he himself was on the point of going, when the British and Russian ministers demanded even more insistently than Miss Sanderson an audience with him. Precisely what they said to him has yet to be published, though we got a fairly reliable version of it before night. But the Shah did not go to Isfahan.

Peter and Miss Sanderson did, however. The first definite news we had of them was from there, in a note of Peter's that came through as soon as the Russians had cleared the road. Not that the note brought any real news. It merely contained an inclosure for M. Godet and laconic thanks for my own part in that affair. Nor did we hear anything more

about our enterprising pair before I had to leave Tehran myself. And here I had run into them again, alive and married, in Washington! It was a common enough whirligig of life, but I was simple enough to be amused by it. I wished that blessed General would hurry up with his National Army. In the meantime I speculated as to which of Mrs. Maturin's emeralds was the Persian one. That, of course, must have been what she meant she owed me. What interested me more, though, was how they had managed to get through the Turkish lines, and how long it had taken them to get married. They must have had adventures, those two.

If life were like stories, Esmeralda would at this point have turned back to me and have taken up her part in these reminiscences, or I would have prepared for it by shouting across the table at Peter. But both these young people were otherwise occupied, while the lady from Pittsburgh continued to be engrossed in Rodman and his aunts. I therefore plied my fork in undistinguished silence, outwardly trying to look intelligent and inwardly comparing the Shoreham with the Hôtel de Paris. If one was rather better appointed and the other a little livelier, it would be hard to say which of the two could collect queerer fish out of the seven seas. Washington and Tehran, for that matter, are a good deal alike. Neither quite looks its part, and in both there is a great deal more news than ever comes out in any paper. I would not swear, either, that it is more reliable or

less fantastic in one capital than in the other. What I found most fantastic, though, was that I, whose own affairs are far from glittering, should turn out to be a sort of Harun-ar-Rashid, carelessly presenting a capricious lady with the jewel of her heart's desire and an unfortunate gentleman with a fortune and a wife. As I considered it I began to feel the pride of the creator in his handiwork. After all, Providence needs a poke now and then. Even Mr. Belasco: would he do as well for us in that new play to which we were going after dinner? Which for some obscure reason reminded me of my newly married cousin Millicent, who didn't want her cook to make friends with the cook next door because the people in that house were Presbyterians. And so on, and so on.

Dessert was in sight before the General finished what he had to say about the improvisation of the Air Service, whose deficiencies I hope he overstated. He then pronounced highly enlightening and worthy of being brought to the attention of the M. I. D. Mrs. Maturin's report of the military preparations of India and Japan—as observed from the port-holes of ocean greyhounds, the windows of first-class compartments, and the lobbies of the best hotels. And at last Mrs. Maturin turned to me.

"But where is it?" I demanded, beginning with what interested me least. "Which one is it?"

It was her turn to be mystified, having been occupied with affairs of state while I was mooning about her and Peter. But, noticing that my eyes were on

the points of green light in her bronze hair, she came around quickly enough.

"Oh, it isn't there. It's—it's quite a story," she broke off. I was ready to believe her. But dessert was already on, and I hadn't waited all that time to hear the threadbare old yarn of bargaining in Asia. "The funny part of it," Mrs. Maturin went on, "is that I saw the Peacock Throne after all—thanks to you." She leaned toward me as if to confide the most delightful of secrets. "That's where I got my emerald."

If jaws could drop, mine would have crashed into my plate. My partnership with Providence had gone rather farther than I foresaw if it had been the means of providing the lovely Esmeralda not only with a historic precious stone, but with one from a piece of furniture which does not exist. I began to feel vaguely uneasy. I remembered what in my pride of a Harun-ar-Rashid I had almost forgotten, that look of Peter's across the table. And so many questions suddenly surged up into the back of my head that I again asked the one which interested me least.

"How soon did you young people make up your minds to get married? In Tehran?"

"Oh dear no! It wasn't till we got to India. And then we were driven into it. People kept making the most stupid mistakes—insisting on giving us the same room, and all that sort of thing. Of course it was a mad thing to do, to trail off like that with a man I had never seen or heard of the week before. But I

was just wild to get that emerald. And Peter was such a sport—not like the rest of you old fogies in Tehran. And then out there in Persia, in sight of the war, things didn't look just as they would here. We had no end of a time, you know. I wondered afterward that I ever had the courage to go through with it. But," she added irrelevantly, "if it hadn't been for that, I would have gone straight to Paris and cut Pierre Loti's throat!"

"O! la! la!" I let out, marvelling that a Mrs. Maturin should hold an unorthodox literary opinion. "Why his?" There are so many other throats that need cutting first.

"Well, he is such an awful liar. I don't know why it is that people who write books give you such false impressions. They always lead you to expect so much colour and magnificence in the East, when it is mostly dirt and fleas—or worse."

It was curious that a lady capable of discovering Kisliavodsk, and of running away with a strange man into the jaws of the Germans, should be incapable of seeing Persia through her own eyes. I might have pointed out to her that if the readers of books have made up their minds what a country ought to be like, the most candid writers of books have small chance against them, and that a Pierre Loti will make admirable prose out of the most unpromising material. But what I wanted to point out to her was that books at least get on with their stories faster than she was doing. Instead of which I remarked:

"The Adorner of the Monarchy is quite a character, isn't he? He must have worked the oracle very quickly, for you to have scuttled off from Tehran as soon as you did."

She smiled.

"He didn't work it in Tehran. He worked it in Kum. That, really, was how Peter happened to go with us. My courier refused to when he heard about that little rumpus the Turks were stirring up."

"Kum!" I cried. "Why Kum, of all earthly places? I never heard of anybody going to Kum except on a pilgrimage to that shrine."

"Well, that's what we did."

I stared at her, for that shrine is one of the most sacred spots in Persia. It is the last resting-place of Fatima the Immaculate, granddaughter I don't remember how many times great of the Prophet, and sister of the Imam Riza—who flies over once a week from his own more famous tomb in Meshed to visit her. And few there are, of Christian birth, that is, who have seen it.

"You look as if you didn't believe me," said Mrs. Maturin. "But it was simple enough. Don't you remember how the Shah tried to run away to Isfahan, and how he sent his things on ahead of him? Well, when he didn't turn up, they put the things into the shrine at Kum for safe keeping. The Adorner of the Monarchy happened to know about it. And you were quite right about the Shah's being willing to sell some of his jewels. That was

how we happened to go to Kum. Have you been there?"

I had to tell her that having spent three years within walking distance, so to speak, of it, I had never visited it.

"I had never even heard of it," she was frank enough to confess. "But it was more like Persia than anything else I saw. We had to go in disguise, you know. I was supposed to be the wife of the Adorner of the Monarchy, and Peter and Claudine were our servants! It was immense fun. But that costume is horribly stuffy, I assure you. And I couldn't half see anything through that little strip of openwork in front of my eyes."

She almost left me speechless.

"Perhaps," I allowed myself to suggest, "that was why you liked it so much."

"I shouldn't wonder," she was again human enough to admit. "But there's really a lot of colour there, besides those usual horrid mud houses and flat roofs. Miles before we got there we could see the dome of Fatima's tomb glittering like a great gold bubble above the plain, with iridescent mountains behind it. And as we got nearer we made out the big turquoise minarets around it, and smaller domes of peacock tiles, and little blue-and-green tiled pinnacles, above cream-coloured walls. You have no idea how attractive it was."

That, I must confess, would ordinarily have been enough to quench my interest. When beautiful la-

dies call a place attractive, the game, so far as I am concerned, is up. But this was a different game.

"Did you really go into the shrine itself?" I asked.

"Of course we did. We had to, to carry out the comedy. And I didn't know what it didn't cost us. They were dreadfully afraid we would betray ourselves and get them into trouble. They whisked us out in no time. I got only the vaguest impression, through my strip of open-work, of a dim-lighted octagon, and a catafalque covered with cloth of gold behind a tall silver grille. But it was worth it."

I was grateful to them, whoever they were, for delaying me no longer than necessary. It came to me a little enviously, though, that beauty and gold are indeed magic keys. Also that dessert was disappearing all too rapidly. Likewise that the lady from Pittsburgh was eyeing Mrs. Maturin through her lorgnette.

"Then they took us," the latter went on, "through a porcelain gateway into the loveliest little cloister I ever saw—all blue and green tiles, with a toy river running through it, in a channel of mossy marble that widened in the centre into a big oblong pool. Some enormous cypress-trees were reflected in it."

I thought it must have been very becoming to her. But I was too afraid of wasting time to tell her so.

"I hoped they would empty the pool and let us into a secret passage at the bottom of it, or something like that. But they took us through a high tiled porch at one end of the court, into a sort of

apartment where the Shah stays when he makes pilgrimages to the shrine—all plaster arabesques, stuck over in the quaintest way with bits of mirror glass."

"Was it there?" I asked desperately, perceiving signs of coffee.

"Not in the room where we sat down. There was nothing but rugs and couches. They served us tea and candies and ices, and they talked about the weather, and asked how many children Peter and I had. They were frightfully embarrassing. And at last, one at a time, they began showing us things that the Shah had sent there and wanted to sell."

"Fancy!" I heard from my right.

"Some of them were quite nice," said Mrs. Maturin. "There were one or two big carpets, and a few of those funny old books full of gaudy little pictures that look like nothing on earth, touched up with gold. Pottery, too. The usual bazaar kind of thing, only better of its kind than usual. Then they showed us jewels—bowls of them! They were nothing very extraordinary, though: mostly rubies and pearls. I didn't have my veil down, either," she added. "They let me put it off, in there. But I wouldn't let them put me off, even when they brought out two or three good enough emeralds. The Adorner of the Monarchy—isn't he killing!—had got us permission to see the Peacock Throne, and I insisted that they must let us see it. So at last, very unwillingly, they took us into an inner room.

It was full of boxes and bundles, piled helter-skelter on top of one another. They cleared off some of them till they came to an enormous case, which they opened with the most ridiculous little adzes you ever saw. And out of it they pulled a mountain of paper and old silks. But under them all was the throne."

Her voice had gradually been lifting, and by this time the rest of the table was silent. What came to me that time was that a story is never quite the same for the different people who listen to it, and that no one there could possibly be listening quite so intensely as I—unless it were Peter. But if he was going down with all on board, he had evidently made up his mind to it. I caught that out of the corner of my eye."

"Did you sit on it?" asked the General, jovially.

"Of course I did!" answered Mrs. Maturin. "And it was as uncomfortable as thrones are said to be. It wasn't a chair at all, but a kind of longish platform, set on seven curved legs, with two or three steps at one end. There was a balustrade around the platform, with enameled inscriptions in cartouches outside of it, and a high back. It ended in a jewelled peacock with an outspread tail of turquoises, sapphires, and emeralds. But the most prodigious emerald of all was set in his breast."

"No diamonds?" demanded Pittsburgh.

"None that I remember," answered Esmeralda, "except in the peacock's crest. He was a wonderful peacock, but somehow he didn't look to me quite in

keeping with the rest of the throne. And sure enough, the Adorner of the Monarchy said I was right. So many things have happened to that throne in all the centuries it has gone knocking around Asia; and the peacock is a modern restoration. But there isn't a particle of doubt about the rest of it. Whatever happens, I can say I have sat on the throne of Tamerlane! He began it, you know. And Jehan Shah, that Indian Mogul who built the Taj Mahal, finished it. And afterward it was looted from Agra by— Who was it?" she asked, turning to me.

"Nadir Shah, from Delhi, in 1739," I replied with more particularity than perhaps was necessary. What could I do? I couldn't, before all those people, point out that her history and her throne didn't go together. Yet each was well enough in its way—except for the peacock. That I had never seen or heard of. But she had not been taken in by it. After all, I breathed more freely. Besides, the liqueurs were being passed.

"Oh, yes; Nadir Shah." Mrs. Maturin took green chartreuse. "And after his death the Kurds got hold of it. But I never dreamed of anything so magnificent. The gold and enamel of the throne were crusted with precious stones, as if a swarm of gorgeous tropical beetles had descended on it. Never in my life have I seen so many emeralds. There was one splendid one on the right arm, uncut and very deep in colour, where the hands of the Shahs and the Moguls and Tamerlane and who knows how many

other kings before him must have rested, when they were granting life and death to the slaves at their feet."

"How interesting!" burst out the lady from Pittsburgh. "But what a pity you didn't see it in the palace, in its own setting, the way we saw the throne of the Sultans in Constantinople! The ambassador happened to be a friend of my husband's, and as a very special favour he got us permission to see the old Seraglio."

The infamous woman had the floor, and she didn't propose to relinquish it until she had told every last detail of that routine experience which was shared by hundreds of tourists every year before the war. I could have cut her throat much more easily than Mrs. Maturin could have cut Pierre Loti's. She had spoiled Mrs. Maturin's story—how utterly nobody knew better than I. And Peter's impassive countenance told me nothing. I shamelessly edged over to Mrs. Peter.

"Which one was it?" I whispered. "The one in the peacock's breast?"

She shook her head. "Too incredible!" She looked around the table, where everyone but the lady from Pittsburgh, was aware that it was time to go to the theatre. The General, drumming a little on the cloth, favoured me with a wink. Mrs. Maturin decided to whisper back. "The one on the arm. We had a terrific time about it. They nearly ruined me for life. Your commission must have been pretty plump! And they made us swear the

most awful oaths that we would never breathe a a word as long we lived. Then they sent us packing that night, out of a little side door, where our carriage was waiting, straight to Isfahan. I carried it in my hand all the way."

"But where is it?" I demanded. "Why on earth didn't you wear it to-night for me to see? Is it too precious?"

She hesitated so queerly that my dormant uneasiness stirred anew.

"Of course, if we had only been buying an emerald, we could have found one quite as good, and for far less in New York; though Peter insists we could not. But then, this was not an ordinary stone. After all, what jewel is, if you know its history? Peter had it beautifully mounted for me—in Agra, in sight of the Taj Mahal. As a matter of fact, though, it doesn't look worth the fortune we paid for it."

"Nothing does," I said as much to myself as to her. "Life is like that. It is the pursuit we value, not the acquisition."

"What I mean," she explained, "is that it doesn't show for what it really is. Those uncut stones never do, you know. And they don't go with modern clothes. So I want to have it cut. It's the only thing on which we differ, Peter and I. You would never guess how sentimental he is."

I somewhat perfunctorily began to assure her that sentiment is coming into fashion again when our hostess at last gave her signal, and we all stood up.

In the moment of confusion that followed I saw Peter join his wife. I also saw, as I pulled away the chair of the lady from Pittsburgh, that she, she of the wattles and the diamonds, and not the lovely Esmeralda, had been the one to save Peter this time. In fact, I saw that you never can tell when life will turn dramatic in your hands, even at so polite a dinner-party as ours. I saw it the more distinctly because it was so invisible. The thing was "a drama of small, smothered, intensely private things," as Henry James says. Nevertheless it made me impatient of the play for which we were already late. Mr. Belasco, of course, would arrange everything very much better, with tears and smiles in their proper order. Here everything had been too long drawn out in the beginning and too much jammed at the end. The end, indeed, was just what was lacking, now that Mrs. Maturin had given it so disquieting a twist—and what I stood small chance of getting hold of in that confounded box at the Belasco.

So I followed the others out of the dining-room, much less concerned about my hat than about the whimsicalities of playing Harun-ar-Rashid. Not that I minded my own fix, now that I took in what it might mean to have a beautiful lady beholden to one for an emerald of Tamerlane. The worst was that they might think I really had taken a commission from that old terror in Tehran. Nor could I feel too sorry for Mrs. Maturin. I had done my best for her, and I had given her due warning. If she had

been taken in, if she had paid a Shah's ransom for a bit of green paste out of the back shop of the Adorner of the Monarchy, it was her own fault. What a magnificent hoax, though, pulled off in how artistic a manner! Mr. Belasco himself couldn't have staged it better, or have left her so unaware of having been taken in. And, after all, she could afford her little caprices. Besides which, she had Peter to show for it. He was more of a jewel than perhaps she knew. If she didn't, she still had her famous eyes and her famous hair. Those were genuine enough and rare enough, in all conscience, and nothing could rob her of them—except time.

But Peter, poor old Peter, who could always play a game, but who could never carry off the stakes: what would time do for him? Peter disturbed me more than anything. Had he been taken in, too? Or—I must confess I was black enough to put that question to myself—had he helped to take Esmeralda in? He would almost have been justified in doing it, hard up as he was at the time. In any case, he must have come in for a very tidy little commission. Otherwise how could he possibly have squared M. Godet so soon? And I wondered if he was capable of the sentiment with which his wife credited him when she confided to me that he didn't want the emerald cut. But if it was cut—there could be no doubt it would be if Mrs. Maturin had so made up her mind—and if the historic jewel did turn out to be a sham, what then? Of course I did not know for

sure; I generally do jump at wrong conclusions. Still, it was a very pretty little predicament even if the stone was genuine. For—

At the cloak-room door I suddenly felt a hand in my arm. It was Peter's. He showed no trace of my self-consciousness.

"Let's walk around to the theatre," he proposed. "A breath of air will be nice after all that cackle. I have told Esmeralda. She's going to take the General in our car. Do you mind?"

I didn't. As for Peter, he at once began to talk quite naturally about Tehran. It amused me, on H Street, to go back to the Lalazar. My news was a little later than Peter's, and I was able to tell him details of the Turco-German invasion, the recapture of Hamadan, the adventures of several of our friends. Half a dozen of the young men he had known in the Hôtel de Paris had already met their fates in France, in Macedonia, in Mesopotamia, in Poland. They had, at any rate—one or two of them—been released in the most unexpected of ways from their obligations to M. Godet. M. Godet himself, for that matter, had not let his collection of I. O. U.'s stand in the way of going home and taking his own part in Armageddon.

These matters kept us from turning down to the Belasco when we reached the corner of Lafayette Square. We compromised by striking into it. And presently Peter announced:

"I have enlisted, too—in the Aviation. They

took me this afternoon. I'm on the ragged edge of being too old for it; but I'm as fit as a fiddle, and I passed all those whirligig things they put you through better than any of the youngsters."

No one, of course, is any longer surprised by anything. I heard myself make the usual remarks, with a wave of my hand toward Lafayette and Rochambeau, standing on their pedestals among the Washington trees. Peter smiled a little.

"I don't know very much about right and wrong, and our debt to France, and all the rest of it; but I'm not used to being a quiet family man, you know, and you feel like a fool rolling around here in a limousine while over there——"

He broke off abruptly, drawing me in the direction of our theatre. He might be fit as a fiddle, but it struck me as I glanced at him under an electric light that he looked worn—as if, perhaps, he had been required to produce itemised accounts, and had found it difficult. He had nothing of his own, not even the oil company now, and with the best possible intentions there seemed no likelihood of his obtaining anything commensurate with his position as the husband of Mrs. Maturin. Charming as his wife was, I should expect to find her a rather precise paymaster. That was an element of the situation which I had not taken in at first in considering what we had brought about, Providence and I. At any rate, Peter would never be able to slide the bill for an extremely large and perfectly cut emerald into his

postage account—the less so as I don't suppose he wrote three letters a year. But long before our winding path brought us back to the street I had absolved him. If he had sowed his wild oat or two, he had never been a cad. He could not have known, poor wretch, what he was letting himself in for. He had never been one to go smelling around antiquity shops. He had not known until he took the emerald to be mounted. And after the commission, the emerald must have become a thing too terrific to explain. Had the marriage been, perhaps, an attempt at reparation which might not succeed? At any rate, Peter had always needed air in moments of exaltation. Well, he would get it. He would no doubt get medals, too. They made me, as we sauntered toward our belated theatre-party, a sufficiently telling picture. I seemed to see, against a background of sanguine mist, with perhaps a white wooden cross visible in it, the image of a Mrs. Maturin no longer young, fingering an emerald now never to be cut, which was all that was left to her of the most romantic episode of her life. But what I saw most clearly was that life is an egregiously jumbled-up mess, and that many nameless things, not to be mentioned in official histories, must lie behind the momentous decisions of life. And then at last we reached the lighted doorway of the theatre. For some reason or other we both hesitated to go in and admire the well-arranged passions and admirable upholstery of Mr. Belasco.

"That was a rum affair you started us off on, wasn't it?" Peter suddenly exclaimed. "But, after all, it was only fair that you should hear the rest of the story. Did my wife tell you the end?"

I hedged.

"She told me that she got the emerald." But I found the courage to add: "She also told me that she was debating whether to have it cut."

"Oh, did she?" uttered Peter, slowly. "Well, you know how women are. They hate to come to a decision. So I decided myself. I made up my mind this morning to end the thing and take it, after all, to the jeweller."

"I hope," ventured I, "that the jeweller was properly impressed with the emerald of Tamerlane. What did he say?"

Peter threw away his cigarette and started into the lobby.

"He had nothing to say. When I got there I found my pocket had been picked. It's the more awkward because I can't help wondering if someone in the recruiting office didn't nab it when I was taking my physical examination. I hardly like to accuse any one there, especially at such a time as this. But I don't know how I shall tell my wife. I was so late getting home that she went on to the dinner without me. She'll be frightfully upset. And you know what the police are. I'm afraid we shall never see it again. Heavens! Look at that clock!"

STUDIO SMOKE

Voi non mi amate ed io non vi amo. Pure qualche dolcezza è ne la nostra vita da ieri. . . .

—Gabriele D'Annunzio: POEMA PARADISIACO.

THAT business of yours, Gimlet, of a thing falling so exactly on the tick, was rather curious. I have an idea, though, that it happens oftener than people might think. I've seen some queer examples of it myself. I remember one in particular. Not that it's anything of a story. It's merely a whiff of a story: you make it up to suit yourself. And the coincidence, now that I stop and think, was perhaps the least of it! But—

I was up in Alaska at the time. I've poked about a bit in my day, you know, and I took into my head once to poke up there. I'd been reading Bret Harte, that sort of thing, and I had an idea I'd do it over again for my generation! Maybe you don't know that I used to have a scribbling bee in my bonnet. I imagine that's really what spoiled my work. I thought if the Renaissance people practised ten or a dozen arts equally well, I might make a stab at two. We get these ideas when we are young, sometimes. Moreover I didn't know that it took more than

miners and mountains, plus a pinch of sentiment, to make a Bret Harte. And if I did him over again you didn't happen to hear about it, did you? However, I had a good time, all the same!

That country took me tremendously. Norway used to be one of my favourite stamping grounds. I was particularly fond of going up there after Italy—only I used to wish there were a subway under Germany when I did it! The contrast was so extraordinary—in colour, line, atmosphere, people, everything. Then simply to breathe in Italy, for me, was such a *volupté* that it bordered on debauch! So after it Norway would come like a cool repentance. And there was a simplicity up there, a silence, a loneliness, that rather upset me after the South. It called out all the things with which the South has nothing to do. There's no use trying to describe it. It's the obverse, don't you know, of *kennst Du das Land*.

Well, Alaska was like a bigger Norway—a Norway with longer fiords, with taller cliffs rising out of greener water, with bluer glaciers, with whiter and louder waterfalls. And it had, proportionately, a greater loneliness and a greater impression of contrast with the rest of the world. If Norway has its Sagas, if nightfall in some wild fiord-end seems literally a dusk of the gods, the silence of Alaska—the sense of its having been there for centuries by itself with no one to hear the grind of the ice and thunder of the waterfalls—takes you back farther yet. And then Norway, after all, is too accessible to be quite

what it should be. Tourists may be as *bête* as you please; but they do have a way, after all, of pouncing on the very places you would like yourself if they didn't exist. The philosophy of the beaten track has yet to be written. Alaska, however, hasn't reached that stage yet. She will come to it in time. She can't help it. More and more people go every year. But they live on the country even less than they do in Norway. They sit on decks and say Oh and Ah as things sail by. They really don't meddle very much.

So in the meantime the sense of contrast is one that you can cultivate at your leisure—if you have any. Not many of them do up there—the real people, I mean. Life is too lively, even if they had the inclination. And they are the very ones who bring the contrasts most sharply to you. Heaven, the types you see! The people from every country under the sun, the people of every imaginable social condition, the people with stories to them a mile long—and not all of them printable! Of course that's chiefly in the mining places, and in the coast places leading to the mining places, where they come and go like ants in a trail, outwardly as much alike as flannel shirts and nondescript kits can make them, inwardly impersonating every race and passion of the world, and all spinning out the great epic of Gold. It's the modern version of the Ring and the Sagas.

However, I wasn't going to give you a ten-minute talk on Alaska. I was going to tell you about my friend the hotel-keeper in Skagway. Although the

name almost sets me off again—on the subject of those flimsy wooden settlements sitting unconcernedly in the shadow of those solemn mountains, and the bizarreness of them, and the romance of them, and the tragedy of them! He went by the name of Chatty Charley, did the hotel-keeper—Chat for short—on the principle of *lucus a non lucendo*. He was never known to utter a word without being asked for it, and he didn't always favour then. Who he was or where he came from nobody knew. Not that anybody cared. They're not long on gossip up there: they have other things to do. Moreover, there is a sort of tacit understanding in the matter of antecedents—or the lack of them. But there was generally some tag by which you could place a man. It didn't take you long to make up your mind that he would be a bar-keep in San Francisco, or a drummer in Chicago, or a sophomore in Harvard. Not that those exhausted the possibilities by any means.

Chatty, however, I had no idea about. Or perhaps it would be truer to say I had a hundred. He would have fitted in anywhere—except Alaska. He was the last man I expected to find up there. Not that he had so much the air of a tenderfoot. And I don't mean any of your high melodrama business—a Lost Heir or a Blighted Being or any of that. It was merely that he was rather a slight man, and wonderfully meek to look upon. He got on wonderfully well, though. He had a name for being square, which in a society like that goes rather farther than

it does in ours, I fancy. You could be as much of a tenderfoot as you pleased; but if you took what was coming to you, and didn't shoot too much bull, and played a square game, they'd be pretty sure to let you through.

So Chatty did a roaring business. And we were great cronies from the start. It was so much so that the others thought we knew rather more about each other than we let on. There may have been something in it—I don't know. However, the reason of it was rather funny. The first time I went into his place—and it was a place, too: if I once began telling you about it, and the things you saw!— the first time I went into his place I noticed right off, among the newspaper cartoons and wild odds and ends which he or the boys had tacked up around the walls, some pictures of Venice—some of those photogravures they get out, you know. Well, I never thought much of them as works of art, although I've seen them in rather unexpected places. But this was the most unexpected of all. The contrast of it hit me like a bullet—that wonderful old town with its perfection of a flower and its hundreds of years—and such years!—behind it, and this wild new raw scrambling place huddled under unknown mountains on the edge of an unknown sea! It knocked me all of a heap. I went staring around like a boob, not noticing much else, until I happened to notice a peaceful person behind the bar who was looking at me.

"Where the devil did these things come from?" I

demanded of him rather abruptly, less by way of conversation than of uttering the question that was uppermost in my mind.

"Oh, I picked them up," replied the peaceful person, who turned out to be Chatty.

"Been there?" I pursued.

"Yes," he answered.

It was a mild enough remark, heaven knows. And there was nothing in the way he made it, except a certain matter-of-courseness. But that was just what knocked me all of a heap again. How should anybody in Alaska, most of all how should anybody in Skagway, have been to Venice except myself? And then I'm clean dotty on the place, anyway. It gets into your blood, you know, and it got into mine before anything else did. I go back there whenever I get a chance, and I can forgive much of a man who betrays a weakness for it. That is one of two or three touchstones I keep in my pocket! So I fell on Chatty and began talking about his pictures, and the place they came from, and he seemed to know all about it. He even knew what I never knew any one else to know—the islands in the lagoon. The Venetians themselves don't know them. They are tremendous landlubbers, gondoliers and all, and apparently make it a point to learn as little as possible of the shallow green sea in which they swim. While as for the tourists, poor dears, they go to the Lido, and Chioggia, and San Lazzaro, and Murano, and Burano, and Torcello, and possibly San Francesco in

Deserto, and *basta*. Chatty also knew Italian, I incidentally discovered. Indeed there came times, once or twice, when we found it rather convenient. You couldn't be sure of not getting caught, though. There are too many funny things prowling around up there under miners' hats for you to trust to no one's understanding your lingo.

Well, for such a short acquaintance we got fairly chummy, Chatty and I. It was so to a degree that made the boys horse him for actually chatting. Not that he really did chat much. He evidently liked to listen to my chatter though, and once in a while, when nobody in particular was around, he would say something about some palace, some garden, some island, that we both knew. It was rather amusing—in Skagway. But the real nature of our relation was still more amusing. I never knew a man so well and so little. For all our chumminess we never had one word on any earthly subject except Venice. I never even got a hint of what he had been up to there, or when, or how, or why, or anything. I had no more idea than the cat on the stairs what part Venice played in the scheme of his existence—any more than I had an idea, above the immediate and obvious one of the hotel, what part Skagway played. He had an absolutely impersonal way of talking, if he talked at all, that left nothing to take hold of. And I never could quite make out whether it was modesty or design—or whether, perhaps, nothing but Venice had ever happened to him.

Of course, after the first surprise—there were various degrees of it as the character of our queer little bond came out—I used to wonder a good deal. But I finally settled down to a sense of the picturesqueness of the business. Our queer little bond, after all, was quite a bond. Marriages have been made on less! And to have such a bond in such a place—one was about as strange as the other. So I gave up any idea of trying to draw the man out. I had made some rather idiotic attempts in that direction. And I used to amuse myself by making the most of our two points of view. I had gone up there for the sake of the wildness and the coolness and the stillness, only to encounter this individual who thought of nothing but Italy! He typified for me the reaching out of the North for the South, the old restlessness of man for the things he has not, which Goethe has put into "Wilhelm Meister."

I don't know whether I would ever have got any farther but for what your story suggested—the rather odd coincidence. And I'm not sure how far I got then. At all events, I was sitting one night at the end of a pier there was, down behind Chatty's hotel, looking at the fiord—the inlet, they call it there. It was late on a Saturday night in July, about half past eleven or twelve. Things were rather nice in the warm dusk of that northern summer, with the mountains standing up purply-black against a sky that still had a glow in it. What I was chiefly noticing, however, was a yacht that had been there a day or

two and was preparing to leave. The rattle of the anchor-chain in the winch, and the splash of the water as the links came dripping up, were loud against the Saturday night noises of the town. And on the deck, where there was a blur of white, I could hear voices, and the fingering of a guitar. I don't know—it was too much for me. There is something about a boat at night, anyway, with the lighted portholes, and everything . . . And then I had been knocking about a good bit up there, and I suppose I was ready to swing around to the other extreme. Anyway, I was pretty near something like homesickness. Which was not at all what I had been when I saw some of the yachters in the town that morning.

As I was chewing it over I heard steps behind me on the pier, rather to my disgust. It turned out to be Chatty, though.

"Hullo, Beau," he remarked, kicking his heels off the end of the pier beside me. "Celebrating *Redentor?*"

Do you know what *Redentor* is? If you don't, just let me tell you that it is one of the last pieces of paganism left in the world. It's a midsummer *festa* in Venice, when the whole town and most of the adjoining mainland spend the evening in boats, eating and drinking and singing under paper lanterns. Then they all go out to the Lido and finish up the night dancing on the sands. And when the sun bobs over the edge of the Adriatic they shout like heathen, and a lot of them pull off their clothes and tear down into

the water. It's the most pagan thing you ever saw. All this is really the eve of a religious festival that comes on the Sunday. But that is a sad and sleepy anticlimax—at best a mere excuse for prolonging the festivities, which are of the crown of the Venetian year.

Well, I reckoned up and found that Chatty was right. It was, barring differences of time, the night of *Redentor*. I wondered why I hadn't thought of it. And the sudden sense of contrast pressed upon me more strongly than ever—the contrast between that palace-bordered canal so far away on the other side of the world, with its flower-lanterns blowing in the darkness, its catches of song, its breath of all that is old and warm and human and I don't know what, and this wild place of the North in its unearthly dusk, so precisely the opposite! I'm not much on the sentimental line; but there are times when I cave, and that was one of them.

We both sat there, thinking the same things, I suppose, while the windlass clinked in the silence. Then from the group of people on the deck of the yacht, what do you suppose we heard? You couldn't imagine. It was the song, the very identical song about love and the sea, which the Venetians sing on the night of *Redentor!* Distinctly to us over the water, in a woman's voice, to the accompaniment of a guitar, came the Venetian words. In such a voice, too!

I looked at Chatty, and Chatty looked at me. It

was incredible. It was incredible enough that he and I should be there; but a third person, and just on that night! At the moment, however, I didn't have time to take in how incredible it was, because as we sat staring at each other the anchor came up with a big splash. Then the yacht began to circle in a half moon off the head of the pier, and glided away like a great white swan. We could hear the woman singing as she went. That was to me even more than the coincidence—the rush of things I had been so long without, those old common conventional things that we so hate when we have them every day! I suppose I looked queer. Chatty did—for Chatty.

"Do you know her?" he asked.

"Know her!" I burst out. "How the devil should I know her? I only wish I did. I'd be steaming down to Seattle instead of kicking my heels over Chilkoot Inlet."

He looked away toward the yacht.

"Oh!" he said. "You knew so many of the things, I thought—perhaps——"

I laughed.

"Well, I don't happen to this time. Do you?"

"Yes," answered Chatty.

That's exactly what he said, if you please: "yes!" I couldn't have been more amazed if the pier had suddenly begun flying through the air.

"Know her, man!" I cried. And then I remembered. "Oh, I suppose you saw them upstreet this morning."

"Did *you?*" he asked. He seemed interested.

"How could I help it?" I rejoined. "You can tell that kind of people a mile off, up here."

"Oh!" he said. "I didn't happen to. I'm in the hotel a good deal, you know."

He looked away again. But I began to get interested.

"How on earth do you know her, then?" I demanded with more curiosity than discretion.

"Well," he answered slowly, "I used to live in the same house with her—over there."

He waved his hand in the direction of the disappearing boat. At that my discretion fared worse than before. It was really, though, with an idea of carrying the thing off lightly that I asked:

"How do you know it's the same one?"

He barely smiled.

"Well, a voice, you know—sometimes it sort of sticks in your head. I suppose you think it's queer. But I could tell you her name—and everything."

He didn't, let me state in passing. But Chatty did tell me something. I don't think it was because I was I—if you gather anything from that elegant phrase! Of course, our bond made me less objectionable than I might have been. But the truth of it was that the spring had been touched and the panel had to yield. Not that I got more than a peep into the secret recess, though. I only saw what lay in front.

"H'm!" mused Chatty aloud, partly to himself

and partly to me. "What a funny girl she was! She was one of those girls who begin to learn things too soon and get through learning them too late. She was rather young, then, too. She was big and black and pale and awkward, and not very pretty." Then, "Was there anybody like that among the people you saw?" he asked suddenly.

I considered.

"No."

"There wouldn't be," he volunteered somewhat inconsequently. After which he went on: "People liked her all the same. There were dozens of them ready to jump into the Canal for her, even then. And I guess some of 'em did. I didn't, though. I didn't like her. I liked to hear her sing, but that was all. I had an idea she posed. She struck me as doing the high tragedy act, and I didn't much care for it. She had funny ways, too. She used to come into my room at all hours of day and night, and I thought she was up to that sham Bohemian game they put on sometimes when they get a chance. Not that I'm so terribly straitlaced myself; but I like people to be what they are, and I didn't think she was. Oh, I had ideas then!"

He stopped, did Chatty, as we watched the last of the yacht. It faded like a ghost into the purple of the cliffs.

"Yes, she was a funny girl," he finally said. Then he put his hand into his pocket and drew out the classic pocketbook. From it, however, he took

neither the classic photograph nor the classic lock of hair—not even the classic rose. But I will admit that he did produce a desiccated vegetable of some sort. This he held up to himself and to me. "When I went away," he said, "she came into my room to watch me pack. She had been in the garden, and she had a big branch of lemon verbena. She broke off a sprig every now and then and threw it into the trunk. I found them all over everything, afterwards. 'When you get to America,' she said, 'it will remind you of the girl you didn't like and who didn't like you.'"

He stopped and looked down the inlet. Then he looked at his sprig again. I wondered what to say.

"Oh!" I uttered tamely. "So you keep it to remind you of the girl you didn't like!"

"Yes," he said—"and who didn't like me."

BEHIND THE DOOR

I

WE never would have seen the place if the idea had not beguiled us, at Trent, of driving through the Dolomites to Bassano. And I doubt whether we would have been so extravagant about it if we had not just come from Germany. Is any quiver quite like that with which the returning victim of Italy greets his first cypress, his first olive tree, his first campanile? We formed imperishable ties with our *irredentista* driver, chiefly because he told us that the inhabitants of his dark little mountain city had turned the back of their statue of Dante to the North. Moreover it was May; and I should perhaps confess that we were too recently married to be altogether responsible. So when we discovered the castle that afternoon as we jingled down the widening gorge of the Val Sugana, we agreed that a princess must be shut up in the tower. Whereupon, as if in confirmation of our insight, an invisible dragon suddenly made himself heard behind the walls.

Otherwise there was no sign of habitation about the place. The rusty wrought-iron gate through which we stopped to look, the weed-checkered flag-

ging within, the ruinous little chapel half averted from us at the right, the cracked and discoloured shafts outlining the court, the gaunt old pile of dark stone with its machicolated tower, formed a picture of abandonment which the dog's barking made a trifle uncanny. But severe and even formidable as the castle was, in spite of its neglect, it had the nobility of perfect proportion. It was not so much a castle, indeed, as a castellated villa. The great arched windows of the façade were scarcely of a period when Ezzelino da Romano scoured these valleys o' nights. Neither were the quarterfoils piercing the parapet of the roof. I remember how exquisite the spring sky looked through them, and between the square merlons of the tower. That element of contrast, taken with all the other circumstances, gave the structure a curious intensity of expression. There was something tragic in the way it lifted itself against the light.

It was part of the effect, and of the incredible richness of Italy, that our friend the driver could tell us nothing about the place. It was merely a *castello qualunque!* Yet how little was it a *castello qualunque* we began to learn not long after we had started on, skirting the wall that hid the princess's dragon until her castle suddenly revealed itself to us, at a turn of the road, under a second and more romantic aspect. And this in spite of the fact that nothing more romantic than a few strands of barbed wire closed what must once have been the state en-

trance. Of course we stopped again—to look at the semicircular recess in the wall, with its lichened stone seats and couchant lions. Between them opened an avenue, I don't know how many hundred yards long, of cypresses I don't know how many hundred years old, that marched and dipped and rose again with such an air to the steps of a balustrated terrace in front of the castle! This fairy arcade, jewel-green with moss as if no one had trodden it for a century and cross-lighted by a westering sun, seemed to lead to some palace of enchantment rather than to the melancholy place we just had passed. So different a face did the villa turn to us now, with a loggia lightening its upper story and the Alps spreading a veil of magic behind it, that even the tower lost its grimness in the golden air. We therefore changed our minds about the princess. We decided that she was lying asleep there as a princess should, waiting for her prince.

II

It was only when we perceived farther down the wall to the left an archway opening into a white farm court, and an old peasant woman looking out of it, that we came back to the ordinary affairs of life. Which, for ourselves, consisted in getting to Bassano. And we found it, after following out of our rocky gorge a river that no one would have suspected of being the lazy Venetian Brenta, one of the most seductive little towns in the universe. Its ivied

walls, its capricious streets, its overshadowing eaves, its pictured façades, its covered bridge, its noisy green river, so ravished two wanderers fresh from the pseudo-classicism of Munich that they instantly resolved to spend there the remainder of their lives.

Certain obstacles, however, opposed this project. The hotels, otherwise perfect establishments of their kind, afforded no outlook save upon the blackest alleys. And these on market mornings were nothing less than bedlam. Moreover a heavenly apartment we had descried from afar, at the top of a house overhanging the Brenta, with a corner loggia that reminded us of the one we had seen in the Val Sugana —an apartment after which no other apartment in the world could make us happy—was occupied by an unnatural parent of many children who refused to entertain our polite proposal that she vacate in our favour, even when we proved to her that we would save her offspring's lives in taking the lease off her hands.

So when our Dæmon led us, sad and destitute of matches, not only to the Caffè al Mondo but to the table next Principe Montughi, we fell as ripe plums into his mouth. But my phrase is far from happy if it lead the reader to imagine that he is about to be treated to a portrait of the dark and designing Italian of romance. In the first place, Principe Montughi might very well have been described as fair. In all his subsequent dealings with us he certainly was. In the second place, the suggestion that we should

occupy a part of his villa had its origin, I remember, in the audacity of my wife. For the rest, I am ready to allow that he was one of the most imposing persons I ever met. The mere sight of his silk hat was a lesson in worldly wisdom, while the air with which he offered me—no: with which he proffered me—the match of destiny made me realise that I must be born again, and a Latin, to carry life off with such a hand. What was more striking about him, though, at least to my Anglo-Saxon eye, was the way he filled his immaculate morning-coat, as if no clothes could ever be big enough for his arms and shoulders. And his head, which was set close to them, looked better suited to batter in gates than to carry silk hats. But its size and squareness and general competence contrasted oddly, again, with the eyes. These were of so pale a blue that from a distance they had the emptiness of a statue's gaze. I wondered whether it were the contiguity of them, or the extreme narrowness of the forehead above them, or the surprised flare of their nearly intermingled eyebrows, that gave them the look of trouble so magnificently contradicted by everything else about the Prince.

Therefore when I say that we fell as ripe plums into his mouth, I merely choose a less graceful, though perhaps less pompous, way of saying that fate had prepared us for him and him for us. And I shall waste no time in pretending that his villa was not the one we had seen up the river. That would make too light of an element of the fatal in our

chance relation of which I, for one, became increasingly conscious. Yet after the way we had gone on about the place, he could scarcely do less than invite us to drive out the next day and see it.

If we secretly trembled lest our first impression were destined to suffer the common lot of first impressions, we proved that we had been right after all. We began to know it as soon as we clattered under the archway of the *podere*, passed out of the picturesque white court into an olive yard, skirted an old garden that had gone all to birds and bushes, and looked down from the terrace into the delicious morning freshness of the cypress avenue. But what really clinched us was the loggia. This was nothing less than a great marble room, opening out of the upper hall of the villa. There were windows on either hand of the door, and in each side wall a niche where statues once had been. As for the front, it was a triptych framed between the low marble parapet and the pillars supporting the roof, wherein were set, with all the art of an Italian May morning, the tangled green of the garden, and the valley shut in between its rocky walls, and the Brenta shining past vineyards and stone pines and scattered farms into a sea of misty sunlight that was the Lombard Plain.

Such a loggia—such a place to work in, to play in, to eat in, to sleep in, to live in—never was on sea or land. Once we set foot in it we forgot Bassano and the unnatural parent and every other human

tie; and the *Principe* was lost. I don't believe he could have got rid of us if he had wanted to. Though, for that matter, I have always wondered why he didn't. Which is not saying that we did not discover reasons enough for his keeping us. But as it was he smiled indulgently at our enthusiasm over his barrack, as he called it, apologised for its dilapidated condition, and said that if we would give him time he would make a few necessary improvements. Such, for instance, as scraping the moss from the avenue of cypresses. This proposal we rejected in horror, crying out that we should never dream of using that entrance and that we would infinitely prefer him to scrape the tiles off the floors. We did agree, however, that he should supply service and an occasional carriage, in addition to our meals. With which understanding we took a reluctant leave, warning the *Principe* to expect us not later than the evening of the second day.

And thus it was that from a carriage hired in the whim of a honeymoon we alighted in an episode the most memorable of our lives.

III

When we returned to take possession, the first person we saw was Principe Montughi. No less suave and impeccable as landlord than as host, he showed us to our rooms, introduced Graziosa, the little peasant girl who was to be our maid, and said dinner would be served at seven o'clock. He was

sorry he had neglected to ask what we wished, and at what time we wished it; but if we would be good enough to put up with our first repast, he hoped we could in the future suit ourselves so far as the resources of his inadequate establishment permitted. He then withdrew, and we proceeded to settle ourselves in our new domain.

Not that there was much settling to be done. Our belongings were no more numerous than could be carried in trunks, while the rooms in which we disposed them were preposterously bare. We suspected that the furniture had gone the way of the front gates, which had been so admired by a passing compatriot of ours that the Prince said he had parted with them for ten times their value and had not yet got around to replacing them. Neither had he yet found time to make other repairs that some people might have considered more pressing. But that was a part of our picnic, as we regarded it. We could have furniture and tight windows at home; but we couldn't have such big cool echoing rooms, or such a loggia, or such a garden, or such a *podere*, or such an olive yard running down to such a river.

Accordingly we were the more surprised by the dinner which Graziosa presently came to tell us was served on the terrace. It was no picnic art with which our uninstructed underlings had set the table and arranged the flowers and the brass *fiorentine* we might need later on, with which they had chosen just the right point for looking down the avenue or

catching the last light of sunset on the tower. So keenly did we realise it that we were ready to give them credit for the stately setting of the terrace, for the mellowness of cracked marble and foot-worn brick and weathered stone, for the rich evening stillness of the garden and the fluting of the birds among the trees. We felt rather like persons in a play, sitting down to a stage dinner. When the soup came on we wondered whether it would be real.

It was—like the delicious trout that followed it, like the dish of macaroni and frizzled eggplant that formed the irresistible piece of resistance, like the crisp salad which prepared the way for a Gorgonzola I would now commit crimes for, like the far from histrionic Verona which bore us through to the coffee. It was all so real, and so acute a sense of the joy of life filled us when at last Graziosa lighted the wicks of the *fiorentine* and left us to a platter of walnuts and a carafe of Marsala, that we hadn't the heart to call her back for nut-crackers. Besides, my wife wanted the secret of that masterpiece of resistance. So she decided to go and ask the old woman herself. And I went along too.

There was more than one piece of foolishness between us, I remember, as we made for the corner of the villa—the one Graziosa had turned as she came and went with our plates. I remember it, and a nightingale in the garden, and our serious agreement that "it" was all "wonderful," as one unaccountably remembers longest a few of the least serious moments

of life. But I remember too the curious change in atmosphere, almost like a breath of chilled air, which we detected even in our foolishness and in that dim light, when the end of the castle lifted its stark mass above us, with the tower darkly overtopping the farther angle. We walked toward it. And presently we made out, beyond a black blotch that suggested a door, two little lighted windows. They twinkled like a pair of eyes, rather too far above the ground for us to look into. I fear we might have done so, then; for in the back of both our heads was a desire to become better acquainted with our romantic domain. A sudden growl in the darkness, however, decided us for the door.

It proved not to be locked. The enormous raftered room into which we stepped, hand still in hand, must have been the original kitchen of the castle. I caught a hasty impression of a vast fireplace, on a central platform under a chimney hood, of tins and coppers and brasses glimmering dully, of Graziosa standing statue-like with a candle. What almost immediately held my eye was a superb three-legged pot of hammered copper full of lettuce heads, standing in the fireplace. Going over to look at it more closely, I became aware that someone else was in the room. My surprise was the greater because this person was not at all the old woman of the farm, or her husband either. It was a man who sat in the shadow at one side in a chef's white cap. He rose silently from the deal table at which he had been

eating the remains of our dinner. And then, to my stupefaction, I recognised the Prince himself.

He took off his white cap and bowed, magnificent as ever. What a feat that was I cannot hope to make clear in a land where we are as used to great changes of fortune as we are to the somewhat inadequate service, at summer hotels, of young gentlemen from the universities. The sense of it flashed for me, as I took in the Prince's masquerade, into a surprised consciousness of a parallel between the man and his house—in which a sense of strange and lamentable things mingled inarticulately with the recognition of a personal force even deeper than I had suspected.

I wish that had been the only reason for the open-mouthed spectacle we made of ourselves. But the transition from the silk hat to the white cap—under which the flare of the Prince's eyebrows looked startlingly made up—was so abrupt, it so carried out our earlier stage illusion, that it is no satisfaction to recall how far we were from smiles. The stare we gave, the glances we involuntarily exchanged, were just as gross.

Of course after that first ignoble moment, which I hope was not so long as the telling of it, we were both eager to extend the right hand of fellowship. But Montughi cut the ground from under our feet.

"Graziosa," he commanded, "the *signori* have lost their way. Show them up to their rooms."

I don't suppose it was five minutes from the time

we left the table on the terrace before we found ourselves back in our loggia, watching the receding glimmer of Graziosa's candle and listening to the echo of her footsteps die away in the dark house.

IV

He showed us our place, did the *Principe*, and we sat in it.

I won't say that we didn't wriggle in it a little, at first. We naturally wanted to show him that if we had broken into his kitchen we were no pair of mere inquisitive snoopers, and that the fact of our having caught him in cap and apron could not make the slightest difference in our relations—unless to improve them. But that was precisely what the *Principe* would not let us do. Such overtures as we made in that direction encountered a stony impassivity which taught us our own unwilling rôle. This was to make two personages of our landlord and of our cook. The former was the impeccable gentleman of the world we had accidentally met at Bassano, who honoured us with an occasional call and who once a week drove splendidly away to town in the old caleche which remained the rest of the time at our disposal. The latter was an invisible chef of no less distinguished qualities. If when we took in the situation and realised that we would never be able to scold our cook we both felt a certain dismay, it was speedily dispelled by the discovery that our cook never required a scolding. But never did he in one

character refer to the other. And never, after one or two futile attempts, did we.

The thing was really preposterous. There we were, the three of us, cut off from the world as if we had been castaways on a desert island, and the man went on to the end pretending now not to be Prince and now not to be cook. A hundred times I was on the edge of bursting out: "Come, my dear fellow, don't make things so hard for yourself and for us." Only—I never did! On the contrary, we sometimes went so far as to ask ourselves whether the two personages might not be separate after all.

We smiled when we recalled our simple anticipations in becoming co-tenants of Castello Montughi. One of them had been that we should at last see something of what the sojourner in Italy so rarely does, an Italian interior. Whereas we discovered that, like everybody else, we were to see nothing at all. Perhaps it was our pique at finding ourselves in so curious and unexpected a subjection that searched for any possible flaw in the Prince's acting, that divined a secret source of indifference under his pride. More was there than we knew, but we didn't much matter one way or the other. I presume we felt it because we thought—and I still think—one reason for our singular relation was that we brought him a breath, such as it was, from a wider world than Val Sugana. At all events it was impossible for us to be indifferent about him. Who on earth was he? We could not help asking each other that question, or

feeling sure that it had an answer. And what had brought him to the straits in which we found him? And why, most of all, did he inhabit this tumble-down castle in the Dolomites when such a personality as his could not fail elsewhere to make its mark?

We kept our questions to ourselves, however. We also kept, after that first misadventure, to our part of the house. But I would create an entirely false impression if I seemed to insinuate that we breathed an air of Maeterlinck or of Poe. What would you? The year was yet young, we ourselves were by no means old, we happened to have stumbled at a moment not the least romantic in life into a setting of the most romantic. Nor did Montughi's eccentricity make it less so. The half-ruined castle, the lonely valley, the rushing river, reacted upon our new-world sensitiveness to such stimuli in a way we could scarcely have resisted. Such twilights as darkened our deserted garden and our great echoing rooms demanded a ghost. And we devoutly continued to believe in the princess who should inhabit the tower.

We took her, like her tower and her loggia and her enchanted avenue of cypresses, for granted —as a piece of the Argument from Design, whereby all things existed for the edification of two wandering Americans who had not long been married. We also took her, it must be said in further disclaimer of that insinuation to which I have just alluded, with giggles. Was she not red-haired, whose head we were one day to behold in a casement or an embrasure of the

tower? On that we usually agreed. My wife, however, held that the mysterious lady was a flame of Montughi's for whom he had ruined himself and whom he had borne away to this solitary retreat to be free of the world and its conventions, to say nothing of importunate husbands. Whereas according to my own less decorative theory our princess was an elderly female relative, possibly a wife but probably a maiden aunt, who suffered from a Jane Eyreish disability of the mental organs, requiring a régime of country air and close surveillance.

In any case, she remained even more obstinately invisible than our princely cook. But while it of course kept alive our more or less humorous speculations to see, after dark, slits of light in the irregularly spaced loopholes of the tower, or sometimes to hear notes from a faraway violin which was doubtless a gramophone, we elaborately avoided the other side of the castle. Although we could laugh about Montughi, we did not wish to give him another occasion for putting us in the wrong. For the same reason we pretended at first to be cool toward Graziosa and the good old people at the *podere*. And I presume it was not wholly our imagination that sensed a reserve under their Latin manners. That pretense did not last long, however. There is a fatal affinity between exiles in Italy and those who serve them. Moreover our unwillingness to use the Prince's gate too often, or to lacerate ourselves by crawling through the barbed wire of our own, made it necessary for us to

go in and out of the farmyard. So we ended by becoming fast friends with the peasants who lived there. Also with their dragon, the watchdog of the place. This was a huge white shaggy creature whom my wife christened Abracadabra and whom we promptly set about corrupting. He was always let loose at night.

For the rest, we spent more and more time prowling about the country. One reason was the *Principe*. We had a rather absurd idea that he might like his place to himself, once in a while. Another was that we found the garden more charming to look at than to idle in, especially after dewfall. It was not for nothing that the moss of the avenue kept so fairy green. Dank that garden was, even beyond the shadow of its tall cypresses. The filmed statues showed it, and the weedy paths. But there were pleasant places along the river, we discovered, of sun-warmed or branch-shaded rocks. There were vineyards hanging on the slopes of the valley, there were cool chestnut glens, there were other farms and other villas—though none so noble as ours. At night, too, as spring lengthened into summer, we often strolled up the road toward Austria or down toward Bassano, stopping to chat at the *podere* on our way back. Graziosa would always light us upstairs, as she had done that first night. Then we always ended by sitting in the loggia by ourselves, not without more chatter. God knows where we found so much to say, but we were never through. Still, we also found

time to listen to the river and the nightingales, to watch the fireflies in the garden, the stars above the the jagged dark rim of the valley, the distant twinkle of the plain.

It was an unforgettable summer.

V

To us it was unforgettable. Otherwise we must have flitted long before we did to scenes where we needed to walk less softly. Yet just that necessity of walking softly was part of the lure. Like so much else of life, however, it was in great part a thing of atmosphere, of colour, of accent, of states of feeling, of moments so real to us but so impossible to capture in word or line that I oftenest think of Castello Montughi in terms of music. It was another similarity of that episode to a piece of music that while the successive phases of it could hardly be labelled as chapters or acts, the transitions between them were perfectly clear. We had begun with an *Andante.* We had gone on to an *Allegro ma non troppo.* The third movement—it had settled down into a *Scherzo,* of the mellower kind. And the final resolution?

That was a *Lamentoso.* And the transition, when at last it came, was so unnerving that I was thankful my wife was not with me. She had been having a touch of malaria—due, I am afraid, to the dampness of the place. I was not really uneasy about her, though, beyond asking myself whether it were time for us to make a move. After she dropped to sleep,

late in the evening, I went out to stretch my legs and get a breath of air.

Without any definite intention, I found myself walking up the valley. That was the direction I always liked best after sundown. The mountains stood out so solemnly against the stars, and the river made such a sound in the dark. I can hear it now. And I can see how sombre the castle and its merloned tower loomed before me when I went back that night. It put me in mind of the first time I had seen them. As I drew near the gate, too, I heard the dog. But it was no bark that came from him. It was a howl, long drawn and mournful. In a moment, however, I discovered what pulled me up short. For there were lights in the little chapel.

My first thought was of fire—until I had time to note that the light was perfectly steady, and to reflect that there was probably nothing left in the chapel to burn. Whereupon, as I watched the glimmer of the dusty old leaded panes, I grew extremely uncomfortable. In fact the hour, the uncanny noise of the dog, the unaccustomed circumstance of the illuminated chapel, all the other circumstances of the place, combined to give me a sensation I have rarely experienced. There have been times when I would be ashamed to make such a confession. But years have emboldened me to think that fearlessness is an insensibility of the nerves which a man should pray to be delivered from. His affair is to be scared as often and as violently as he pleases, but to keep his

head. Which, I presume, was the reason why it seemed to me worthy to investigate. I therefore tiptoed around to the other entrance, where I almost yielded to a temptation to wake up the peasants. Luckily Abracadabra saved me from it by bounding at me out of the dark with a growl. When he recognised me he trotted quietly along beside me. That growl, however, reminded me of another time when I had investigated, and had been sorry for it. I gave Abracadabra a good-night pat and went into the house.

I found my wife still asleep. I could make out her quiet breathing, and the soft curve of her arm across the pillow. As I bent over her I heard Abracadabra again. I went out to the loggia. It was too late for nightingales. There were cicadas, now, in the cypresses. The melancholy shrilling of them, out of the black shadow, affected me almost as much as the dog. He had stopped his noise, though. I could see the ghostly shape of him down on the terrace, waiting. I don't know—I felt a sudden shame of my retreat. I tiptoed back to my room, picked up my revolver, touched the soft arm on the pillow with my lips, and stole down stairs.

The dog ran to meet me at the terrace door, wagging his tail and sticking his cold nose into my hand. We turned the corner, we passed the low arch leading into the kitchen. The two little windows beside it were dark. So were the loopholes of the tower. But, beyond that redoubtable angle, I found the

light still burning in the chapel. I wished the door were open at least a crack. I also wished, in spite of Abracadabra's company, that I had not undertaken to prove I was not a coward. I stood there looking, listening, seeing nothing but those faintly lighted panes, hearing nothing but the cicadas and the river. I wondered if it were the sound of my own blood, unwilling as I was to go forward or to go back.

Presently, from inside the chapel, I heard a violin. Of that, this time, there could be no doubt. And in the stillness I recognised that sobbing theme from the Sixth Symphony of Chaikovsky, which everybody knows and sentimentalises over or laughs at. But nobody ever heard it as I heard it that night in the shadow of Castello Montughi, while cicadas chanted ethereally in the black cypresses and the Brenta muttered among its rocks. I didn't laugh. I stood quivering. The theme swept on to its climax, returned, flowered magically, tragically, into developments I had never listened to or dreamed. If I can't play a violin myself, I have sat in front of all the Russians and Jews and Gypsies who can. But no one of them ever let loose with his bow such pent-up passion and misery. Not one, ever. There was no mere poetry in that violin. There was heartbreak in it. There was damnation in it. There were wild tears, pleading, hunger, hopelessness, remorse. There was in it all of life that is unfulfilled and not to be assuaged and beyond utterance. And all

poured out in a tone of gold, with the stroke of a god —or a demon.

No wonder that infernal dog started howling again. I could have howled myself. I'm not sure that I didn't. However, before I could stop him the dog broke away from me. He leaped forward to the chapel door, scratched at it, finally threw his big body against it. The latch gave and the door flew open. The dog disappeared inside. As he did so I heard, instead of the music, a sort of crack and a brief whine. But what I saw, across the dark court, left me no time to think of that. For the moment I was too astonished even to be startled. Little as I had expected what lay behind the door, I expected nothing less than those two great candles and that statuesque profile upturned between them. The delicate line of the profile was incredibly white against the frescoed wall of the chapel. Then it came over me that she was not carved in marble, on a mediæval tomb, but that she was dead, lying there on her bier, in her *capella ardente*—that woman whose exquisitely cut features wore such an air of race.

For what I did afterward I don't know whether I had an excuse or not. At first I was absurdly, horribly, shaken. I have a physical shrinking from death that is too much for me. I would rather have faced any marauder than that dead princess whom I had never seen, lying so white and silent between her candles, with her black hair sweeping down about

her. Then the violin: there had been about it something unearthly. Could I have been imagining again? Could that have been a music of the supernatural? But as my senses grew calmer, as there came back to me the remembrance of all that had set this place so apart in my life, as I thought of the warm arm I had kissed a few minutes ago, watching that profile whose still beauty seemed the very image of a pure and noble pride, the mystery and awesomeness of it moved me less than a kind of passion of pity—that she should be lying alone there in the night, with no one but a dog beside her. And, yielding to a sudden impulse, I walked into the chapel.

Never, but never, did I regret an impulse more.

Principe Montughi was standing at the foot of the bier, his great head sunk between his powerful shoulders, his strange pale eyes on the white face between the candles. My own astounded eyes took him in, the two pieces of a violin bow in the hands clasped before him, the broken violin between the paws of the dog lying at his feet. My emotion flashed into an embarrassment so acute that I could neither speak nor move. But he did not break out on me as I expected—as I deserved. He did not even look at me, at first. And when he did it was as if I were not there.

"Too late," he muttered. "Too late. She will not hear me, now. And when she could I would not play to her."

His eyes were stranger and paler than ever. In

the candle light they were like two spots of phosphorescence. Then they changed. I could see him slowly search my face, the revolver in my hand, the night behind me. Something of it was in his eyes when they came back to my face. Finally he spoke again.

"Is your wife honest?" he asked.

For very amazement I failed to realise the import of his question. The scene and the man appalled me. He had met me a few hours before, with the same self-possession. He could not long have put off that grotesque masquerade which secretly amused me. Yet the Princess must have been already dead, or dying. I began—I don't know what I began to think. Then I suddenly recollected that in Italian the Prince's adjective had a particular meaning, as applied to a woman.

"Is that why you shut her up here?" I burst out in indignation, in divination.

But I grew humble as he continued to stare at me. It was as if I could look through his blank eyes into a place of extremity which was not good to see.

"No," he replied at last. "That is—she never would tell me."

He said it quite simply, gazing down at the proud white face on the bier with a hypnotic intensity of demand. It made my anger shrivel away into nothing. It made me shiver. I saw something dreadful in the smile just touching the dead woman's lips—a smile of Leonardo that was what you chose. But to

me it was less dreadful than the sighing admission of the man's words. They somehow grew up monstrously before me in the candle-light of the little painted chapel. They painted for me a picture of pride more terrifying than anything I had conceived. Inscrutably they unlocked the tower into which I had never stepped, peopled the lonely castle, haunted that fairy aisle of cypresses. Inexorably they uncovered for me, behind the smiling mask of my own life, the ghosts of sorrow and defeat, forebodings blacker and more intolerable still.

The poignancy of that revelation choked me, blinded me. I staggered back into the dark, leaving Montughi to take what answer he could from the mute lips of his Princess.

THE BALD SPOT

HOW'LL you have it, sir?" asked the barber: "Wet or dry?"

"It depends," answered Jerry. "In politics I'm for the wet. In hair-cuts it's dry for mine."

He regarded the mirror not without complacency, studying the image which he there beheld of a young man about town and noting incidentally how much it improved the appearance of the same to be well cropped.

The barber, a cold man and an assured, met his eye in the glass:

"I'm with you in politics. But when it comes to hair-cuts I like a little brilliantine. Your hair seems to be getting a bit thin, too. How about an application of Pinaud?"

An application! Jerry shook a bored head. He knew them of old, these barbers, with their soaps, their singeings, their powders, their pastes, their variously perfumed waters, and their endless ingenuities for parting a customer and his money. The concluding rites of the occasion were conducted in a refined silence.

"Will that do, sir?" the barber inquired at length, throwing off the swathing cloths of his victim. "I'll

show you how it looks." He produced a hand-glass which he manipulated in such a way as to reveal to Jerry the back of his own head.

Jerry saw how it looked. He never had seen it look that way before. And what he saw disturbingly diminished his complacency. He therefore distributed more lavish gratuities than was his wont. Then he fled, conscious but of two purposes. The first was to put forever behind him the discoverer of his shame. The second was to ascertain as quickly as possible the true facts of his case.

He was not a man, Jerry, greatly given to the mirror. Not that he was above criticising the effect of a tie or the cut of a coat. But there were studies which he pursued more assiduously than that of Narcissus. When, however, he at last locked himself into his own room it was with feverish haste that he seized his shaving-glass and made for the bureau. He then held the glass on high, tipped it this way and that, finally caught the right angle.

Yes—he met the cruel confirmation with as bold a front as he could—it was only too true. There it was, the Spot, inexorable, vivid, glaring at him like a malignant eye. There were things in that eye. There were things— The sensation it gave him was too absurd.

He tried to laugh it away.

"'Out, damnëd spot!'" he exclaimed. And he put the glass down. It was idiotic to be prinking there like a girl in her first ball-dress. As he walked across

the room, however, he could not resist a temptation to feel of the place. He began to rummage gingerly in his hair. The barber was right—he felt a sudden flash of fury at the fellow!—it was not so thick as it had been. Yet it felt as it did yesterday, the day before, the day before that. Could he not be mistaken? He must take one more look.

He did so, this time adjusting the complicated reflections more easily. But his adjuration had been of no avail. Nay, his own touch had deceived him. The Spot was not out. It was in—very much in. It was in to stay. It looked at him, whichever way he turned, like a horrid leering eye. It stared him out of countenance.

He threw the glass down again and once more tried persiflage.

"'Go up, bald-head!'" he jeered at himself, aloud.

It sounded distinctly foolish in the empty room. The late sunshine pouring in through the windows made him feel as if someone had caught him making an ass of himself. He flung himself on the lounge and proceeded in a detached manner to study the beauties of the ceiling. As he tilted his head to do so, he scraped the wall paper. The sudden chill of it against his scalp made him jump up as if he had been branded. But the iron did not stop at his skull. It went on down through him. He could almost hear it sizzle in his soul.

"Well," he remarked with forced philosophy, "it's come."

Just what had come, he did not for the moment specify. Perhaps he could not have done so. It was something very upsetting, though, even if it were ridiculous; and philosophy didn't seem to help it any better than persiflage. And the more he considered it the nastier it grew. It gradually filled him with a curious cold pang. It filled the room. He could not bear it.

"All right," he growled sardonically, looking for his hat. "If it won't 'out' by itself, we'll have to take it out. It's too damned stuffy in here."

He realised the importance of the occasion, as being his first public appearance in the character of a bald-headed man. It made him self-conscious and apologetic. It likewise made him welcome the opportunity of wearing a hat. For he felt that within-doors, hereafter, the eyes of men would mockingly follow him wherever he moved. At the very moment, however, of stepping into the air his attempted assurance failed him. An old gentleman happened to be passing—an old gentleman below the rear of whose hat brim projected into the light of day a ludicrous pink half moon. Jerry instinctively, albeit unobtrusively, sought the corresponding region of his own person.

"Huh!" he grunted in relief. "I guess we're not quite so bad as that—yet a while."

He resumed his progress a trifle more at ease. But fatalities beset him. Boys were playing ball in the street, under horses' hoofs and in defiance of the

police. Most of them were bare-headed. He believed they did it on purpose to show off their little polls, how absurdly uniform they were in colour. A sudden resentment boiled in him against them, as if he had been the Prophet Elisha; and he yearned to set bears on them. He would throw in the barber as the *pièce de résistance*. That barber! Jerry had half a mind to go back and— But he dismissed these low themes from his mind. As he turned the corner, though, the first thing he beheld was the portrait, on a bill-board, of a splendid gentleman with Jove-like locks, waving a majestic hand toward the name of the preparation which had performed so enviable a miracle.

"Really," muttered Jerry to himself, "I must look those people up. I'm not so far gone, after all. And at my age— You never can tell."

Then a motor car went by. There were four persons in it—two young men and two girls, hatless all. Jerry's eyes followed them hopefully. If only they would justify him! But no Spot was there. The young people whirled gaily up the Avenue as if the world belonged to them. And Jerry knew it did. His heart sank again. The smartness of the car, the prettiness of the girls, the hilarity and unconcern of the whole business, smote him like a blow.

"Yes," he thought, "it's come. And why should it come to me rather than to them? Are they more virtuous than I? Are they more learned? Do they know Gothic architecture from Renaissance? Or a

cosine from an ensign? No. But they have more hair. Therefore—Q. E. D.!"

This cryptic conclusion, with its somewhat mixed references, apparently had the effect of guiding Jerry's thoughts into more definite channels. "They," as he walked, became the burden of his meditations. They made for him a composite of eyes grey, blue, black, brown—even the modern hues of yellow and green; of auburn, chestnut, bronze, golden, raven, and every other shade of hair celebrated by poets; of aspects rosy or pale, grave or smiling, ingenuous or subtle. They were Venuses, Madonnas, Medeas, Giocondas—the whole gallery of types most provocative to man. He had always vaguely expected that one of them—perhaps all of them: such things were not unknown!—would some day appear, and— Well, he had never quite settled what was to happen next. It wouldn't exactly do for them to fall on his neck at that stage of the game. That would cut out too many of the preliminary thrills incident to these adventures. Neither would he fall on their neck. It would be too public. They might not like it. They would probably run away if he tried. At all events, something very breathless was to take place. He was to pursue them over land and sea. He was to endure fire and sword for their sake. And in the end they were, so to speak, to fall into his mouth like ripe plums. Or perhaps it wouldn't come to anything in the end. Things didn't, nowadays. But at least it was going to be

very ravaging for somebody. If it didn't turn out a Browning business it might turn out a Tristan and Isolde affair. And Tristan and Isolde, as a domestic tableau, were almost more telling than the Brownings. Or the denouement was to be a noble renunciation, with moving scenes of parting; and he was to finish up grandly with an exploded volcano for a heart.

The only trouble was that he had never yet encountered "them." Julia Jenkins, hitherto, had been his sole approach to them; and whatever else Julia might be, she certainly was no Venus. Least of all was she a Madonna, a Medea, or a Gioconda. And now they, the others, had maddeningly flashed past him at the one moment in life when he found himself least disposed to speed after them. For a bald spot, somehow or other, did not harmonise with the order of experiences he had been considering. He inwardly contemplated the spectacle of a gentleman so afflicted pursuing Beauty o'er moor and fen, his Spot gleaming pale behind him as he sped; and Jerry laughed grimly to himself. But there was more in it than a laugh. Was not Beauty the portion of every man? And if Fate were so ironical as to withhold her until Time had shown his tooth, must she then forever be foresworn? It was too ignoble—the way tragedy and comedy ran together in the world. He tried to console himself, for this chaotic state of affairs, with the volcano: by fancying that he was already dead to the world. But even

that failed—unless extinct volcanoes felt as uncomfortable inside as he did.

"My good fellow," he admonished himself with some heat, "you started out to take a walk as a bald-headed man, and you'd better finish it in that character. You mistook your rôle; that's all. Some people are born to autos and ambrosial locks. Other people are born to a bald spot and the L. You imagined you belonged to the former class, but it turns out you don't. So the sooner you stop trying to cover your nakedness with a hat, and the sooner you take to your predestined conveyance, the less will you be like a whited sepulchre full of dead men's bones."

In accordance with which principle he removed his last year's Panama and made for the nearest Elevated station. The next instant he realised that only on impulse could his courage have risen to such a pitch. He expected that boys would follow him, hooting; that a mob would collect to point at him the finger of scorn. But no: the public took it quite as a matter of course that a young man of his age and talents should begin to look a little the worse for wear and should patronise such rapid transit facilities as were within the means of the proletariat. They took it so much as a matter of course that Jerry began to forget his agitation in chagrin. He even mounted the steps of a station and boarded the first train without asking himself where he was going.

It was with some surprise that he presently dis-

covered himself to be jolting northward, on a level with third and fourth storey windows. He found a certain distraction in glancing into these as he passed. It appeared to him that on every other sill leaned a bald-headed man, who gave him a pointed look—as who should say: "Don't take it so hard, my poor young man. You will have company." They got on his nerves, those bald-headed apes. Most of them were in shirt-sleeves, too. He was ready to bestow the most extravagant admiration upon the Park, when the train rounded the great curve at 110th Street. And the arch of the unfinished Cathedral had a romantically ruinous effect against the incandescent sky. These things, however, for some reason reminded him of the young people in the car. "They're probably visiting the châteaux of the Loire by this time," he reflected. "I wonder how they like it. This is the kind of travelling we do—we bald-headed people." And he relapsed into the volcanic mood. . .

"One hundred and fifty-fifth Street! All out!" bawled an unsympathetic conductor.

Jerry got up from his revery with the idea of taking the next train back. There seemed nothing else to do—for one born to the L. But when he emerged into the maze of platforms and tracks and stairways, he found them so vividly intershot by red rays from another level of existence that he was moved to mount to the viaduct. As he did so he mounted into the climax of a sunset. The glamour of it glorified his

squalid surroundings. It touched the confusion of traffic with a glint of romance. It turned the Harlem into a river of enchantment. Jerry glanced but coldly about him, however. He thought of the valley of the Loire. And the sight of an Amsterdam Avenue trolley running black against the west made him bend his steps toward that end of the viaduct.

"That's what we bald-headed people do," he said to himself: "We go to Fort George. We then mount Ferris Wheels and view the landscape o'er. Thus do we visit the valley of the Loire." And with that idea he boarded the next car. But at 181st Street he changed his mind. The sight of Washington Bridge suddenly drew him. "Go to," he thought: "Why shouldn't we take in our Loire here and now?" To which end he sauntered easterly across the little plaza.

He had not gone far on the bridge before he stopped. At last he was really caught. The splendour had died out of the air—the barbaric and obvious splendour which had failed to move him before. There was now a warm twilight in which the stream running deep between its banks, the wooded slopes, the arches of High Bridge, the slim water-tower, took on an aspect almost of antiquity. But that and the mysterious vista beyond—the turn of the river, the fading haze of roofs, out of which myriads of lights began to flicker with a brassy pallor—needed no antiquity to make them extraordinarily picturesque.

Jerry leaned on the parapet and took it in. The view might have been one he never had seen. This wonderful valley led to a city he knew naught of. The strange impression, and the surprise of discovering a real beauty, led him back in thought to the city to which he had come from college—how curiously long ago! He recalled that other impression of strangeness. Threading in imagination the long streets that somewhere ran there in the dusk, he remembered how they looked to him when first he wandered through them—in search of something to do. How vast and forbidding their towers had loomed above him! Would any of them give entrance to him when he knocked? And which would be the one? He had knocked at a good many, too. An amazing number had been oblivious to the honour of harbouring him. Huge as they were, they were all jammed to the roof with cheerful busy superior persons, who naturally had no mind to jam themselves still tighter at a mere knock from without. But one of the towers did take him in at last—the one in Park Row which made an end to his wanderings, only to send him out on wanderings more painful still.

He thought of them, looking back into the twilight that deepened above their sky, as of things almost impersonal. He thought, too, how different it had come to seem—being a cheerful busy superior person in one of the towers! For he had lived through a reporter's probation days, had climbed at

last to a desk high above the city, where the city noises came to him rather musically in their mingling. But, listening to them year after year, he had never heard what he always expected he would hear at last —the sound of his own fame. So many names came up from the newsboys' throats, those criers of immortality: should not his own one day be borne to him? And for better reasons than gave men the notoriety of an hour—like falling into a man-hole or finding a lost jewel? Well, there was no reason—except that he had never done anything. . .

"Doing things!" That was another piece of youth, like the young ladies of his more romantic moments. He had never been able very narrowly to define them, the things. In that case he probably would have done them. But they were of a highly decorative order. They were also to prove of inestimable benefit to the World at large—with a large W. And the World's gratitude, incidentally, would enable him to retire to private life on the proceeds. After which there would be an appropriate tablet up there in the Hall of Fame, and a column or two in future encyclopædias. Whereas now—

With the very impulse to smile indulgently at himself, there flashed on Jerry for the first time in his life the full sense of what it meant. For if he could smile at his youth and the vanities of his youth, it was because his youth was gone. And that was no smiling matter. That was what had hung over him all the afternoon. That was what he had been trying

to get away from. But now he had to face it. It was all very well to tell himself that he was a fool to get into such a state for so preposterous a reason; that his calamity was by no means unique in the world; that he was not so old after all. The fact remained that his youth, his *première jeunesse,* his golden hour, was done for.

The sudden realisation of it filled him with a passionate bitterness. What under the sun had he been thinking of, that he had not seen that priceless thing slipping through his fingers? Where had it gone? What had he done with it? What had he to show for it? It seemed to him that the darkness which fell while his thoughts were turning in this hopeless round was symbolic of an obscurity that for him had crept into the sunlight of the earth. And the things he had lost were as fairylike and unattainable as the magic city glittering there in the distance, above those shadowy arches printed against a river of gold.

He scrambled to the parapet and sat staring down into the underlying chasm. The twinkle of the Speedway and the jewelry of the opposite switches just made visible the water between. How black it was, and how noiseless—like another Lethe! The word hung in his mind as it came back to him how casually one step had followed another this afternoon, yet how irresistibly, as if foreordained. And one step more would take him into oblivion. . . After all, why not? Wouldn't it be logical? Had he any real reason for turning around and going back

to life—save sheer cowardice? The accepted reasons had always struck him as being childish attempts to decorate a raw animal impulse. If you faced the thing honestly, what was life, anyway, after the climacteric of youth? Nothing but a long drawn out decay of the body, a gradual dulling of the senses, an imperceptible slackening of the will—a slower and more humiliating death. For a man with someone to live for or something to create, it might be different. But for him—

"Well, Buddy," uttered a cheerful voice behind him: "Thinkin' o' jumpin' overboard?"

Jerry did jump, but not in the direction indicated; and his fingers caught instinctively at the inner edge of the parapet. In the dim light he discovered his interlocutor to be a policeman, built in the generous proportions of his kind and of the age that has yielded to the elderly spread.

"You don't seem to be doing very much to stop it," Jerry replied without hauteur.

"Looks that way, don't it?" returned the guardian of the law genially, leaning with elbows on the parapet. "But you see if you really want to go, you'll go; an' if you don't there ain't no reason in natur' why you shouldn't enjoy yourself kickin' your heels over Harlem Speedway. That's how it strikes me. Only if you do go over, just do me the favour not to pick the road. You'd be surprised to see what a mess you'd make."

Jerry, considering this view of his liberty, gave his

attention to a train which swept in a blur of light down the opposite bank. As for the policeman, he gave his attention to Jerry:

"What's the matter? Has she given you the go-by?"

"No" declared Jerry, with a shade of emphasis.

"Been fired from your job then, I s'pose," pursued he of the helmet, in the accent of one acquainted with disasters more calamitous than those of the heart.

"Not that I've heard of," rejoined Jerry.

The policeman took off his helmet and laid it on the parapet beside him.

"Pleasant way to spend an evenin', ain't it?" he said. "You make up your mind just how you'll go, when you get good and ready. An' then you wonder who'll find you first, an' whether they'll take you to the hospital or the morgue, an' what a time they'll have figurin' out who the devil you are, an' how blue your folks'll be, an' how they'll wish they'd given you that horse-shoe stickpin for Christmas, an' how your girl'll go on, an' all. O there ain't nothin' like it for passin' the time."

"Say" demanded Jerry, turning upon his companion with some loftiness, "where do you get that stuff?"

"Why? Do you smell it?" asked the policeman. He ran the powerful hand of the law through a grizzled pompadour.

"N-no," returned Jerry slowly, eyeing this opera-

tion not without interest. "You don't mean to say that any of your hair ever came out, do you?"

"Huh-huh." The policeman's singsong betrayed no surprise at this abrupt turn of the conversation. "It started droppin' like leaves in the fall o' the year, when I was about as young as you."

"What did you do?" inquired Jerry, not displeased, a little incredulous, and now unfeignedly interested.

"Why I used oil, if you want a straight tip—just plain castor oil. It's twice as good as them high-falutin fixin's they soak you for in barber shops. It don't spoil your pillow, neither. But the missus," he added on reflection, "she says a bald spot's worse inside the bean than out, an' there ain't no oil'll help it."

"That's quite an idea," commented Jerry elusively. He leaned back, as if to reconnoitre the field of ideas.

The policeman accepted this tribute of respect. Then he replaced his helmet on his well-covered crown and stuck his billy under his arm.

"Listen, Bud," he announced confidentially: "I got another idea. Do you happen to have as much as a dollar or so about you?"

"I do," admitted Jerry.

"That's fine," continued the policeman. "Now what do you say we go over to a place I know an' let me treat you to a shot o' somethin' wet? My old woman gives me hell if I hold anythin' out on her, an' ——"

"Sure!" said Jerry.

THE EMPEROR OF ELAM

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. Ecclesiastes: ix, 11.

I

THE first of the two boats to arrive at this unappointed rendezvous was one to catch the eye even in that river of strange craft. She had neither the raking bow nor the rising poop of the local *mehala,* but a tall incurving beak, not unlike those of certain Mesopotamian sculptures, with a windowed and curtained deck-house at the stern. Forward she carried a short mast. The lateen sail was furled, however, and the galley was propelled at a fairly good gait by seven pairs of long sweeps. They flashed none too rhythmically, it must be added, at the sun which had just risen above the Persian mountains. And although the slit sleeves of the fourteen oarsmen, all of them young and none of them ill to look upon, flapped decoratively enough about the handles of the sweeps, they could not be said to present a shipshape appearance. Neither did the black felt caps the boatmen wore, fantastically

tall and knotted about their heads with gay fringed scarves.

This barge had passed out of the Ab-i-Diz and was making its stately enough way across the basin of divided waters below Bund-i-Kir, when from the mouth of the Ab-i-Gerger—the easterly of two turbid threads into which the Karun above this point is split by a long island—there shot a trim white motor-boat. The noise she made in the breathless summer sunrise, intensified and re-echoed by the high clay banks which here rise thirty feet or more above the water, caused the rowers of the galley to look around. Then they dropped their sweeps in astonishment at the spectacle of the small boat advancing so rapidly toward them without any effort on the part of the four men it contained, as if blown by the breath of jinn. The word *Firengi*, however, passed around the deck —that word so flattering to a great race, which once meant Frank but which now, in one form or another, describes for the people of western Asia the people of Europe and their cousins beyond the seas. Among the friends of the jinn, of whom as it happened only two were Europeans, there also passed an explanatory word. But although they pronounced the strange oarsmen to be Lurs, they caused their jinni to cease his panting, so struck were they by the appearance of the high-beaked barge.

The two craft drifted abreast of each other about midway of the sunken basin. As they did so, one of the Europeans in the motor-boat, a stocky black-

moustached fellow in blue overalls, wearing in place of the regulation helmet of that climate a greasy black *beret* over one ear, lifted his hand from the wheel and called out the Arabic salutation of the country:

"Peace be unto you!"

"And to you, peace!" responded a deep voice from the doorway of the deck-house. It was evident that the utterer of this friendly antiphon was not a Lur. Fairer, taller, stouter, and older than his wild-looking crew, he was also better dressed—in a girdled robe of grey silk, with a striped silk scarf covering his hair and the back of his neck in the manner of the Arabs. A thick brown beard made his appearance more imposing, while two scars across his left cheek, emerging from the beard, suggested or added to something in him which might on occasion become formidable. As it was he stepped forward with a bow and addressed a slim young man who sat in the stern of the motor-boat. "Shall we pass as Kinglake and the Englishman of *Eothen* did in the desert," asked the stranger, smiling, in a very good English, "because they had not been introduced? Or will you do me the honour to come on board my—ark?"

The slim young man, whose fair hair, smooth face, and white clothes made him the most boyish looking of that curious company, lifted his white helmet and smiled in return.

"Why not?" he assented. And, becoming conscious that his examination of this surprising

stranger, who looked down at him with odd light eyes, was too near a stare, he added: "What on earth is your ark made of, Mr. Noah?"

What she was made of, as a matter of fact, was what heightened the effect of remoteness she produced—a hard dark wood unknown to the lower Karun, cut in lengths of not more than two or three feet and caulked with reeds and mud.

"'Make thee an ark of gopher wood,'" quoted the stranger. "'Rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and thou shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.'"

"Bitumen, eh?" exclaimed the slim young man. "Where did you get it?"

"Do you ask, you who drill oil at Meidan-i-Naft?"

"As it happens, I don't!" smiled the slim young man.

"At any rate," continued the stranger, after a scarcely perceptible pause, "let me welcome you on board the Ark." And when the unseen jinni had made it possible for the slim young man to set foot on the deck of the barge, the stranger added, with a bow: "Magin is my name—from Brazil."

If the slim young man did not stare again, he at least had time to make out that the oddity of his host's light eyes lay not so much in the fact of their failing to be distinctly brown, grey, or green, as that they had a translucent look. Then he responded briefly, holding out his hand:

"Matthews. But isn't this a long way from Rio de Janeiro?"

"Well," returned the other, "it's not so near London! But come in and have something, won't you?" And he held aside the reed portière that screened the door of the deck-house.

"My word! You do know how to do yourself!" exclaimed Matthews. His eye took in the Kerman embroidery on the table in the centre of the small saloon, the gazelle skins and silky Shiraz rugs covering the two divans at the sides, the fine Sumak carpet on the floor, and the lion pelt in front of an inner door. "By Jove!" he exclaimed again. "That's a beauty!"

"Ha!" laughed the Brazilian. "The Englishman spies his lion first!"

"Where did you find him?" asked Matthews, going behind the table for a better look. "They're getting few and far between around here, they say."

"Oh, they still turn up," answered the Brazilian, it seemed to Matthews not too definitely. Before he could pursue the question farther, Magin clapped his hands. Instantly there appeared at the outer door a barefooted Lur, whose extraordinary cap looked to Matthews even taller and more pontifical than those of his fellow-countrymen at the oars. The Lur, his hands crossed on his girdle, received a rapid order and vanished as silently as he came.

"I wish I knew the lingo like that!" commented Matthews.

Magin waved a deprecatory hand.

"One picks it up soon enough. Besides, what's

the use—with a man like yours? Who is he, by the way? He doesn't look English."

"Who? Gaston? He isn't. He's French. And he doesn't know too much of the lingo. But the blighter could get on anywhere. He's lived all over the place—Algiers, Egypt, Baghdad. He's been chauffeur to more nabobs in turbans than you can count. He's a topping mechanic, too. The wheel hasn't been invented that beggar can't make go 'round. The only trouble he has is with his own. He keeps time for a year or two, and then something happens to his mainspring and he gets the sack. But he never seems to go home. He always moves on to some place where it's hotter and dirtier. You should hear his stories! He's an amusing devil."

"And perhaps not so different from the rest of us!" threw out Magin. "What flea bites us? Why do you come here, courting destruction in a cockleshell that may any minute split on a rock and spill you to the sharks, when you might be punting some pretty girl up the backwaters of the Thames? Why do I float around in this old ark of reeds and bulrushes, like an elderly Moses in search of a promised land, who should be at home wearing the slippers of middle age? What is it? A sunstroke? This is hardly the country where Goethe's citrons bloom!"

"Damned if I know!" laughed Matthews. "I fancy we like a bit of a lark!"

The Brazilian laughed too.

"A bit of a lark!" he echoed.

Just then the silent Lur reappeared with a tray.

"I say!" protested Matthews. "Whiskey and soda at five o'clock in the morning, in the middle of July——"

"1914, if you must be so precise!" added Magin jovially. "But why not?" he demanded. "Aren't you an Englishman? You mustn't shake the pious belief in which I was brought up, that you are all weaned with Scotch! Say when. It isn't every day that I have the pleasure of so fortunate an encounter." And, rising, he lifted his glass, bowed, and said: "Here's to a bit of a lark, Mr. Matthews!"

The younger man rose to it. But inwardly he began to feel a little irked.

"By the way," he asked, nibbling at a biscuit, "can you tell me anything about the Ab-i-Diz? I dare say you must know something about it—since your men look as if they came from up that way. Is there a decent channel as far as Dizful?"

"Ah!" uttered Magin slowly. "Are you thinking of going up there?" He considered the question, and his guest, with a flicker in his lighted eyes. "Well, decent is a relative word, you know. However, wonders can be accomplished with a stout rope and a gang of natives, even beyond Dizful. But here you see me and my ark still whole—after a night journey, too. The worst thing is the sun. You see I am more careful of my skin than you. As for the shoals, the rapids, the sharks, the lions, the nomads who pop at you from the bank, *et cetera*—you are an Englishman!

Do you take an interest in antiques?" he broke off abruptly.

"Yes—though interest is a relative word too, I expect."

"Quite so!" agreed the Brazilian. "I have rather a mania for that sort of thing, myself. Wait. Let me show you." And he went into the inner cabin. When he came back he held up an alabaster cup. "A Greek kylix!" he cried. "Pure Greek! What an outline, eh? This is what keeps me from putting on my slippers! I have no doubt Alexander left it behind him. Perhaps Hephaistion drank out of it, or Nearchus, to celebrate his return from India. And some rascally Persian stole it out of a tent!"

Matthews, taking the cup, saw the flicker brighten in the Brazilian's eyes.

"Nice little pattern of grape leaves, that," he said. "And think of picking it up out here!"

"Oh you can always pick things up, if you know where to look," said Magin. "Dieulafoy and the rest of them didn't take everything. How could they? The people who have come and gone through this country of Elam! Why just over there, at Bund-i-Kir, Antigonus fought Eumenes and the Silver Shields for the spoils of Susa—and won them! I have discovered—— But come in here." And he pushed wider open the door of the inner cabin.

Matthews stepped into what was evidently a stateroom. A broad bunk filled one side of it, and the visitor could not help remarking a second interior

door. But his eye was chiefly struck by two, three, no four, chests, which took up more space in the narrow cabin than could be convenient for its occupant. They seemed to be made of the same mysterious dark wood as the "ark," clamped with copper.

"I say! Those aren't bad!" he exclaimed. "More of the spoils of Susa?"

"Ho! My trunks? I had them made up the river, like the rest. But I wonder what would interest you in my museum. Let's see." He bent over one of the chests, unlocked it, rummaged under the cover, and brought out a broad metal circlet which he handed to Matthews. "How would that do for a crown, eh?"

The young man took it over to the porthole. The metal, he then saw, was a soft antique gold, wrought into a decoration of delicate spindles, with a border of filigree. The circlet was beautiful in itself, and astonishingly heavy. But what it chiefly did for Matthews was to sharpen the sense of strangeness, of remoteness, which this bizarre galley, come from unknown waters, had brought into the familiar muddy Karun.

"As a matter of fact," went on the Brazilian, "it's an anklet. But can you make it out? Those spindles are Persian, while the filigree is more Byzantine than anything else. You find funny things up there, in caves——"

He tossed a vague hand, into which Matthews put the anklet, saying:

"Take it before I steal it!"

"Keep it, won't you?" proposed the astonishing Brazilian.

"Oh, thanks. But I could hardly do that," Matthews replied.

"Why not?" protested Magin. "As a souvenir of a pleasant meeting! I have a ton of them." He waved his hand at the chests.

"No, really, thanks," persisted the young man. "And I'm afraid we must be getting on. I don't know the river, you see, and I'd like to reach Dizful before dark."

The Brazilian studied him a moment.

"As you say," he finally conceded. "But you will at least have another drink before you go?"

"No, not even that, thanks," said Matthews. "We really must be off. But it's been very decent of you."

He felt both awkward and amused as he backed out to the deck, followed by his imposing host. At sight of the two the crew scattered to their oars. They had been leaning over the side, absorbed in admiration of the white jinn-boat. Matthews's Persian servant handed up to Magin's butler a tray of tea glasses—on which Matthews also noted a bottle. In honour of that bottle Gaston himself stood up and took off his greasy cap.

"A thousand thanks, Monsieur," he said. "I have tasted nothing so good since I left France."

"In that case, my friend," rejoined Magin in

French as good as his English, "it is time you returned!" And he abounded in amiable speeches and ceremonious bows until the last *au revoir*.

"*Au plaisir!*" called back Gaston, having invoked his jinni. Then, after a last look at the barge, he asked over his shoulder in a low voice: "Who is this extraordinary type, M'sieu Guy? A species of an Arab, who speaks French and English and who voyages in a galley from a museum!"

"A Brazilian, he says," imparted M'sieu Guy—whose surname was beyond Gaston's Gallic tongue.

"Ah! The uncle of America! That understands itself! He sent me out a cognac, too! And did he present you to his *dame de compagnie?* She put her head out of a porthole to look at our boat. A Lur, like the others, but with a pair of blistering black eyes! And a jewel in her nose!"

"It takes you, Gaston," said Guy Matthews, "to discover a dame of company!"

II

When the white motor-boat had disappeared in the glitter of the Ab-i-Diz, Senhor Magin, not unlike other fallible human beings when released from the necessity of keeping up a pitch, appeared to lose something of his gracious humour. So, it transpired, did his decorative boatmen, who had not expected to row twenty-five miles upstream at a time when most people in that climate seek the relief of their *serdabs* —which are underground chambers cooled by run-

ning water, it may be, and by a tall *badgir*, or air chimney. The running water, to be sure, was here, and had already begun to carry the barge down the Karun. If the high banks of that tawny stream constituted a species of air chimney, however, such air as moved therein was not calculated for relief. But when Brazilians command, even a Lur may obey. These Lurs, at all events, propelled their galley back to the basin of Bund-i-Kir, and on into the Ab-i-Shuteit—which is the westerly of those two halves of the Karun. Before nightfall the barge had reached the point where navigation ends. There Magin sent his majordomo ashore to procure mounts. And at sunset the two of them, followed by a horse-boy, rode northward six or seven miles, till the city of Shustar rose dark above them in the summer evening, on its rock that cleaves the Karun in two.

The Bazaar by which they entered the town was deserted at that hour, save by dogs that set up a terrific barking at the sight of strangers. Here the *charvadar* lighted a vast white linen lantern, which he proceeded to carry in front of the two riders. He seemed to know where he was going, for he led the way without a pause through long blank silent streets of indescribable filth and smells. The gloom of them was deepened by jutting balconies, and by innumerable *badgirs* that cut out a strange black fretwork against amazing stars. At last the three stopped in front of a gate in the vicinity of the citadel. This was not one of the gateways that separate the differ-

ent quarters of Shustar, but a door in a wall, recessed in a tall arch and ornamented with an extraordinary variety of iron clamps, knobs, locks, and knockers.

Of one of the latter the *charvadar* made repeated use, until someone shouted from inside. The horse-boy shouted back, and presently his lantern caught a glitter of two eyes in a slit. The eyes belonged to a cautious doorkeeper, who after satisfying himself that the visitors were not enemies admitted the Brazilian and the Lur into a vaulted brick vestibule. Then, having looked to his wards and bolts, he lighted Magin through a corridor which turned into a low tunnel-like passage. This led into a sort of cloister, where a covered ambulatory surrounded a dark pool of stars. Thence another passage brought them out into a great open court. Here an invisible jet of water made an illusion of coolness in another, larger, pool, overlooked by a portico of tall slim pillars. Between them Magin caught the glow of a cigar.

"Good evening, Ganz," his bass voice called from the court.

"Heaven! Is that you?" replied the smoker of the cigar. "What are you doing here, in God's name? I imagined you at Mohamera, by this time, or even in the Gulf." This remark, it may not be irrelevant to say, was in German—as spoken in the trim town of Zurich.

"And so I should have been," replied the polyglot

Magin in the same language, mounting the steps of the portico and shaking his friend's hand, "but for—all sorts of things. If we ran aground once, we ran aground three thousand times. I begin to wonder if we shall get through the reefs at Ahwaz—with all the rubbish I have on board."

"Ah, bah! You can manage, going down. But why do you waste your time in Shustar, with all that is going on in Europe?"

"H'm!" grunted Magin. "What is going on in Europe? A great family is wearing well cut mourning, and a small family is beginning to turn green! How does that affect two quiet nomads in Elam—especially when one of them is a Swiss and one a Brazilian?" He laughed, and lighted a cigar the other offered him. "My dear Ganz, it is an enigma to me how a man who can listen to such a fountain, and admire such stars, can perpetually sigh after the absurdities of Europe! Which reminds me that I met an Englishman this morning."

"Well, what of that? Are Englishmen so rare?"

"Alas, no—though I notice, my good Ganz, that you do your best to thin them out! This specimen was too typical for me to be able to describe him. Younger than usual, possibly; yellow hair, blue eyes, constrained manner, everything to sample. He called himself Mark, or Matthew. Rather their apostolic air, too—except that he was in the Oil Company's motor-boat. But he gave me to understand that he was not in the Oil Company."

"Quite so."

"I saw for myself that he knows nothing about archæology. Who is he? Lynch? Bank? Telegraph?"

"He's not Lynch, and he's not Bank, and he's not Telegraph. Neither is he consul, or even that famous railroad. He's—English!" And Ganz let out a chuckle at the success of his own characterisation.

"Ah! So?" exclaimed Magin elaborately. "I hear, by the way, that that famous railroad is not marching so fast. The Lurs don't like it. But sometimes even Englishmen," he added, "have reasons for doing what they do. This one, at any rate, seemed more inclined to ask questions than to answer them. I confess I don't know whether it was because he had nothing to say or whether he preferred not to say it. Is he perhaps a Son of Papa, making the grand tour?"

"More or less. Papa gave him no great letter of credit, though. He came out to visit some of the Oil people. And he's been here long enough to learn quite a lot of Persian."

"So he starts this morning, I take it, from Shelei-lieh. But why the devil does he go to Dizful, by himself?"

"And why the devil shouldn't he? He's out here, and he wants to see the sights—such as they are. So he's going to take a look at the ruins of Susa, and at your wonderful unspoiled Dizful. Shir Ali Khan will be delighted to get a few *tomans* for his empty house by the river. Then the 21st, you know, is the

coronation. So I gave him a letter to the Father of Swords, who——"

"Thunder and lightning!" Magin's heavy voice resounded in the portico very like a bellow. "You, Ganz, sent this man to the Father of Swords? He might be one of those lieutenants from India who go smelling around in their holidays, so pink and innocent!"

"What is that to me?" demanded the Swiss, raising his own voice. "Or to you either? After all, Senhor Magin, are you the Emperor of Elam?"

The Brazilian laughed.

"Not yet! And naturally it's nothing to you, when you cash him cheques and sell him tinned cows and quinine. But for a man who perpetually sighs after Europe, Herr Ganz, and for a Swiss of the North, you strike me as betraying a singular lack of sensibility to certain larger interests of your race. However— What concerns me is that you should have confided to this young man, with such a roll of sentimental eyes as I can imagine, that Dizful is still 'unspoiled'! If Dizful is unspoiled, he might spoil it. I've found some very nice things up there, you know. I was even fool enough to show him one or two."

"Bah! He likes to play tennis and shoot! You know these English boys."

Magin considered those English boys in silence for a moment.

"Yes, I know them. This one told me he liked a bit of a lark! I know myself what a lark it is to navi-

gate the Ab-i-Diz, at the end of July! But what is most curious about these English boys is that when they go out for a bit of a lark they come home with Egypt or India in their pocket. Have you noticed that, Ganz? That's their idea of a bit of a lark. And with it all they are still children. What can one do with such people? A bit of a lark! Well, you will perhaps make me a little annoyance, Mr. Adolf Ganz, by sending your English boy up to Dizful to have a bit of a lark. However, he'll either give himself a sunstroke or get himself bitten in two by a shark. He asked me about the channel, and I had an inspiration. I told him he would have no trouble. So he'll go full speed and we shall see what we shall see. Do you sell coffins, Mr. Ganz, in addition to all your other valuable merchandise?"

"Naturally, Mr. Magin," replied the Swiss. "Do you need one? But you haven't explained to me yet why you give me the pain of saying good-bye to you a second time."

"Partly, Mr. Ganz, because I am tired of sleeping in an oven, and partly because I—the Father of Swords has asked me to run up to Bala Bala before I leave. But principally because I need a case or two more of your excellent *vin de champagne*—manufactured out of Persian petroleum, the water of the Karun, the nameless abominations of Shustar, and the ever effervescing impudence of the Swiss Republic!"

"What can I do?" smiled the flattered author of

this concoction. "I have to use what I can get, in this God-forsaken place."

"And I suppose you will end by getting a million, eh?"

"No such luck! But I'm getting a piano. Did I tell you? A Blüthner. It's already on the way up from Mohamera."

"A Blüthner! In Shustar! God in heaven! Why did you wait until I had gone?"

"Well, aren't you still here?" The fact of Magin's being still there, so unexpectedly, hung in his mind. "By the way, speaking of the Father of Swords, did you give him an order?"

"I gave him an order. Didn't you pay it?"

"I thought twice about it. For unless you have struck oil, up in that country of yours where nobody goes, or gold——"

"Mr. Adolf Ganz," remarked the Brazilian with some pointedness, "all I ask of you is to respect my signature and to keep closed that many-tongued mouth of yours. I sometimes fear that in you the banker is inclined to exchange confidences with the chemist—or even with the Son of Papa who cashes a cheque. Eh?"

Ganz cleared his throat.

"In that case," he rejoined, "all you have to do is to ask him, when you meet him again at Bala Bala. And the English bank will no doubt be happy to accept the transfer of your account."

Magin began to chuckle.

"We assert our dignity? Never mind, Adolf. As a matter of fact I have a high opinion of your discretion—so high that when I found the Imperial Bank of Elam I shall put you in charge of it! And you did me a real service by sending that motor-boat across my bow this morning. For in it I discovered just the chauffeur I have been looking for. I am getting tired of my galley, you know. You will see something when I come back."

"But," Ganz asked after a moment, "do you really expect to come back?"

"But what else should I do? End my days sneezing and sniffling by some polite lake of Zurich like you, my poor Ganz, when you find in your hand the magic key that might unlock for you any door in the world? That, for example, is not my idea of a lark, as your Son of Papa would say! Men are astounding animals, I admit. But I never could live in Europe, where you can't turn around without stepping on someone else's toes. I want room! I want air! I want light! And for a collector, you know, America is after all a little bare. While here——!"

"O God!" cried Adolf Ganz out of his dark Persian portico.

III

As Gaston very truly observed, there are moments in Persia when even the most experienced chauffeur is capable of an emotion. And an unusual number of such moments enlivened for Gaston and his com-

panions their journey up the Ab-i-Diz. Indeed Matthews asked himself more than once why he had chosen so doubtful a road to Dizful, when he might so much more easily have ridden there, and at night. It certainly was not beautiful, that river of brass zigzagging out of sight of its empty hinterland. Very seldom did anything so visible as a palm lift itself against the blinding Persian blue. Konar trees were commoner, their dense round masses sometimes shading a white-washed tomb or a black tent. Once or twice at sight of the motor-boat a *bellam*, a native canoe, took refuge in the mouth of one of the gullies that scarred the bank like sun-cracks. Generally, however, there was nothing to be seen between the water and the sky but two yellow walls of clay, topped by endless thickets of tamarisk and nameless scrub. Matthews wondered, disappointed, whether a jungle looked like that, and if some black-maned lion walked more softly in it, or slept less soundly, hearing the pant of the unknown creature in the river. But there was no lack of more immediate lions in the path. The sun, for one thing, as the Brazilian had predicted, proved a torment against which double awnings faced with green were of small avail. Then the treacheries of a crooked and constantly shallowing channel needed all the attention the travellers could spare. And the rapids of Kaleh Bunder, where a rocky island flanked by two reefs threatened to bar any further progress, afforded the liveliest moments of their day.

The end of that day, nevertheless, found our sightseer smoking cigarettes in Shir Ali Khan's garden at Dizful and listening to the camel bells that jingled from the direction of certain tall black pointed arches straddling the dark river. When Matthews looked at those arches by sunlight, and at the queer old flat-topped yellow town visible through them, he regretted that he had made up his mind to continue his journey so soon. However, he was coming back. So he packed off Gaston and the Bakhtiari to Shelei-lieh, where they and their motor-boat belonged. And he himself, with his servant Abbas and the *charvadar* of whom they hired horses, set out at nightfall for the mountain citadel of Bala Bala. For there the great Salman Taki Khan, chieftain of the lower Lurs, otherwise known as the Father of Swords, was to celebrate as became a redoubtable vassal of a remote and youthful suzerain the coronation of Ahmed Shah Kajar.

It was nearly morning again when, after a last scramble up a trough of rocks and gravel too steep for riding, the small cavalcade reached a plateau in the shadow of still loftier elevations. Here they were greeted by a furious barking of dogs. Indeed it quickly became necessary to organise a defence of whips and stones against the guardians of that high terrace. The uproar soon brought a shout out of the darkness. The *charvadar* shouted back, and after a long-distance colloquy there appeared a figure crowned by the tall *kola* of the Brazilian's boatmen,

who drove the dogs away. The dialect in which he spoke proved incomprehensible to Matthews. Luckily it was not altogether so to Abbas, that underling long resigned to the eccentricities of the *Firengi*, whose accomplishments included even a sketchy knowledge of his master's tongue. It appeared that the law of Bala Bala forbade the door of the Father of Swords to open before sunrise. But the tall-hatted one offered the visitor the provisional hospitality of a black tent, of a refreshing drink of goats' buttermilk, and of a comfortable felt whereon to stretch cramped legs.

When Matthews returned to consciousness he first became aware of a blinding oblong of light in the dark wall of the tent. He then made out a circle of pontifical black hats, staring at him, his fair hair, and his indecently close-fitting clothes, in the silence of unutterable curiosity. It made him think, for a bewildered instant, that he was back on the barge he had met in the river. As for the black hats, what astonished them not least was the stranger's immediate demand for water, and his evident dissatisfaction with the quantity of it they brought him. There happily proved to be no lack of this commodity, as Matthews' ears had told him. He was not long in pursuing the sound into the open, where he found himself at the edge of a village of black tents, pitched in a grassy hollow between two heights. The nearer and lower was a detached cone of rock, crowned by a rude castle. The other peak, not quite so precipi-

tous, afforded foothold for scattered scrub oaks and for a host of slowly moving sheep and goats. Between them the plateau looked down on two sides into two converging valleys. And the clear air was full of the noise of a brook that cascaded between the scrub oaks of the higher mountain, raced past the tents, and plunged out of sight in the narrower gorge.

"Ripping!" pronounced Matthews genially to his black-hatted gallery.

He was less genial about the persistence of the gallery, rapidly increased by recruits from the black tents, in dogging him through every detail of his toilet. But he was rescued at last by Abbas and an old Lur who, putting his two hands to the edge of his black cap, saluted him in the name of the Father of Swords. The Lur then led the way to a trail that zigzagged up the lower part of the rocky cone. He explained the quantity of loose boulders obstructing the path by saying that they had been left there to roll down on whomever should visit the Father of Swords without an invitation. That such an enterprise would not be too simple became more evident when the path turned into a cave. Here another Lur was waiting with candles. He gave one each to the newcomers, leading the way to a low door in the rock. This was opened by an individual in a long red coat of ceremony, carrying a heavy silver mace, who gave Matthews the customary salutation of peace and bowed him into an irregular court. An infinity of

doors opened out of it—chiefly of the stables, the old man said, pointing out a big white mule or two of the famous breed of Bala Bala. Thence the visitor was led up a steep stone stair to a terrace giving entrance upon a corridor and another, narrower, stone stair. From its prodigiously high steps he emerged into a hall, carpeted with felt. At this point, the Lurs took off their shoes. Matthews followed suit, being then ushered into what was evidently a room of state. It contained no furniture, to be sure, save for the handsome rugs on the floor. The room did not look bare, however, for its lines were broken by a deep alcove, and by a continuous succession of niches. Between and about the niches the walls were decorated with plaster reliefs of flowers and arabesques. Matthews wondered if the black hats were capable of that! But what chiefly caught his eye was the terrace opening out of the room, and the stupendous view.

The terrace hung over a green chasm where the two converging gorges met at the foot of the crag of Bala Bala. Matthews looked down as from the prow of a ship into the tumbled country below him, through which a river flashed sinuously toward the faraway haze of the plains. The sound of water filling the still clear air, the brilliance of the morning light, the wildness and remoteness of that mountain eyrie, so different from anything he had yet seen, added a last strangeness to the impressions of which the young man had been having so many.

"What a pity to spoil it with a railroad!" he could

not help thinking, as he leaned over the parapet of the terrace.

"Sahib!" suddenly whispered Abbas behind him.

Matthews turned, and saw in the doorway of the terrace a personage who could be none other than his host. In place of the *kola* of his people this personage wore a great white turban, touched with gold. The loose blue *aba* enveloping his ample figure was also embroidered with gold. Not the least striking detail of his appearance, however, was his beard, which had a pronounced tendency toward scarlet. His nails were likewise reddened with henna, reminding Matthews that the hands belonging to the nails were rumoured to bear even more sinister stains. And the bottomless black eyes peering out from under the white turban lent surprising credibility to such rumours. But there was no lack of graciousness in the gestures with which those famous hands saluted the visitor and pointed him to a seat of honour on the rug beside the Father of Swords. The Father of Swords furthermore pronounced his heart uplifted to receive a friend of Ganz Sahib, that prince among the merchants of Shustar. Yet he did not hesitate to express a certain surprise at discovering in the friend of the prince among the merchants of Shustar one still in the flower of youth, who exhibited at the same time the features of good fortune and the lineaments of prudence. And he inquired as to what sorrow had led one so young to fold the carpet of enjoyment and to wander so far from his parents.

Matthews, disdaining the promptings of Abbas—who stood apart like a statue of obsequiousness, each hand stuck into the sleeve of the other—responded as best he might. In the meantime tea and candies were served by a black hat on bended knee, who also produced a pair of ornate pipes. The Father of Swords marvelled that Matthews should have abandoned the delights of Shustar in order to witness his poor celebrations of the morrow, in honour of the coronation. And had he felt no fear of robbers, during his long night ride from Dizful? But what robbers were there to fear, protested Matthews, in the very shadow of Bala Bala? At that the Father of Swords began to make bitter complaint of the afflictions Allah had laid upon him, taking his text from these lines of Sadi: "If thou tellest the sorrows of thy heart, let it be to him in whose countenance thou mayst be assured of prompt consolation." The world, he declared, was fallen into disorder, like the hair of an Ethiopian. Within the city wall was a people well disposed as angels; without, a band of tigers. After which he asked if the young *Firengi* were of the company of those who dug for the poisoned water of Bakhtiari Land, or whether perchance he were of the People of the Chain.

These figures of speech would have been incomprehensible to Matthews, if Abbas had not hinted something about oil rigs. He accordingly confessed that he had nothing to do with either of the two enterprises. The Father of Swords then expatiated on

those who caused the Lurs to seize the hand of amazement with the teeth of chagrin, by dragging through their valleys a long chain, as if they meant to take prisoners. These unwelcome *Firengis* were also to be known by certain strange inventions on three legs, into which they would gaze by the hour. Were they warriors, threatening devastation? Or were they magicians, spying into the future and laying a spell upon the people of Luristan? Their account of themselves the Father of Swords found far from satisfactory, claiming as they did that they proposed to build a road of iron, whereby it would be possible for a man to go from Dizful to Khorremabad in one day. For the rest, what business had the people of Dizful, too many of whom were Arabs, in Khorremabad, a city of Lurs? Let the men of Dizful remain in Dizful, and those of Khorremabad continue where they were born. As for him, his white mules needed no road of iron to carry him about his affairs.

Matthews, recalling his own thoughts as he leaned over the parapet of the terrace, spoke consolingly to the Father of Swords concerning the People of the Chain. The Father of Swords listened to him, drawing meditatively at his waterpipe. He thereupon inquired if Matthews were acquainted with another friend of the prince among the merchants of Shustar, himself a *Firengi* by birth, though recently persuaded of the truths of Islam; and not like this visitor of good omen, in the bloom of youth, but bearded and hardened in battles, bearing the scars of them on his face.

Matthews began to go over in his mind the short list of Europeans he had met on the Karun, till suddenly he bethought him of that extraordinary barge he had encountered—could it be only a couple of days ago?

"Magin Sahib?" he asked. "I know him—if he is the one who travels in the river in a *mehala* not like other *mehalas*, rowed by Lurs."

"'That is a musk which discloses itself by its scent, and not what the perfumers impose upon us,'" quoted the Father of Swords. "This man," he continued, "our friend and the friend of our friend, warned me that they of the chain are sons of oppression, destined to bring misfortune to the Lurs. Surely my soul is tightened, not knowing whom I may believe."

"Rum bounder!" said Matthews to himself, as his mind went back to the already mythic barge, and its fantastic oarsmen from these very mountains, and its antique-hunting, history-citing master from oversea, who quoted the Book of Genesis and who carried mysterious passengers with nose-jewels. But our not too articulate young man was less prompt about what he should say aloud. He began to find more in this interview than he had expected. He was tickled at his host's flowery forms of speech, and after all rather sympathised with the suspicious old ruffian. Yet it was not for him to fail in loyalty toward the "People of the Chain." Several of them he knew, as it happened, and they had delighted him with their wild yarns of surveying in Luristan. So he managed

no more than to achieve an appearance of slightly offended dignity.

Considering which, out of those opaque eyes, the Father of Swords clapped those famous hands and commanded a responsive black hat to bring him his green chest. At that Matthews pricked up interested ears indeed. The chest, however, when set down in front of the Father of Swords, proved to be nothing at all like the one out of which the Brazilian had taken his gold anklet. It was quite small and painted green, though quaintly enough provided with triple locks of beaten iron. The Father of Swords unlocked them deliberately, withdrew from an inner compartment a round tin case, and from that a roll of parchment which he pressed to his lips with infinite solemnity. He then handed it to Matthews.

He was one, our not too articulate young man, to take things as they came and not to require, even east of Suez, the spice of romance with his daily bread. His last days, moreover, had been too crowded for him to ruminate over their taste. But it was not every day that he squatted on the same rug with a scarlet-bearded old cut-throat of a mountain chief. So it was that his more or less casual lark visibly took on, from the perspective of this castle in Luristan, as he unrolled a gaudy emblazonment of eagles at the top of the parchment, a new and curious colour. For below the eagle he came upon what he darkly made out to be a species of treaty, inscribed neither in the Arabic nor in the Roman but in the Teutonic char-

acter, between the Father of Swords and a more notorious War Lord. And below that was signed, sealed, and imposingly paraphed the signature of one Julius Magin. Which was indeed a novel aspect for a Brazilian, however versatile, to reveal.

He permitted himself, did Guy Matthews, a smile.

"You do not kiss it?" observed the Father of Swords.

"In my country," Matthews began—

"But it is, may I be your sacrifice," interrupted the Father of Swords, "a letter from the Shah of the Shahs of the *Firengis*." It was evident that he was both impressed and certain of impressing his hearer. "He has promised eternal peace to me and to my people."

The Englishman in Matthews permitted him a second smile.

"The Father of Swords," he said, "speaks a word which I do not understand. I am a *Firengi*, but I have never heard of a Shah of the Shahs of the *Firengis*. In the house of Islam are there not many who rule? In Tehran, for instance, there is the young Ahmed Shah. Then among the Bakhtiaris there is an Ilkhani, at Mohamera there is the Sheikh of the Cha'b, and in the valleys of Pusht-i-Kuh none is above the Father of Swords. I do not forget, either, the Emirs of Mecca and Afghanistan, or the Sultan in Stambul. And among them what *Firengi* shall say who is the greatest? And so it is in *Firengistan*. Yet as for this paper, it is written in the tongue of a king

smaller than the one whose subject I am, whose crown has been worn by few fathers. But the name at the bottom of the paper is not his. It is not even a name known to the *Firengis* when they speak among themselves of the great of their lands. Where did you see him?"

The Father of Swords stroked his scarlet beard, looking at his young visitor with more of a gleam in the dull black of his eyes than Matthews had yet noticed.

"Truly it is said: 'Fix not thy heart on what is transitory, for the Tigris will continue to flow through Baghdad after the race of Caliphs is extinct!' You make it clear to me that you are of the People of the Chain."

"If I were of the People of the Chain," protested Matthews, "there is no reason why I should hide it. The People of the Chain do not steal secretly through the valleys of Pusht-i-Kuh, telling the Lurs lies and giving them papers in the night. I am not one of the People of the Chain. But the king of the People of the Chain is also my king. And he is a great king, lord of many lands and many seas, who has no need of secret messengers, hostlers and scullions of whom no one has heard, to persuade strangers of his greatness."

"Your words do not persuade me!" cried the Father of Swords. "A wise man is like a jar in the house of the apothecary, silent but full of virtues. If the king who sent me this letter has such hostlers

and such scullions, how great must be his khans and viziers! And why do the Turks trust him? Why do the other *Firengis* allow his ships in Bushir and Basra? Or why do not the People of the Chain better prove the character of their lord? But the hand of liberality is stronger than the arm of power. This king, against whom you speak, heard me draw the sigh of affliction from the bosom of uncertainty He deigned to regard me with the eye of patronage, sending me good words and promises of peace and friendship. He will not permit the house of Islam to be troubled. From many we have heard it."

"Ah!" exclaimed Matthews. "Now I understand why you have not kept your promises to the People of the Chain!" And he rubbed his thumb against his forefinger, in the gesture of the East that signifies the payment of money.

"Why not?" demanded the Father of Swords, angrily. "The duty of a king is munificence. Or why should there be a way to pass through my mountains? Has it ever been said of the Lur that he stepped back before a stranger? That is for the Shah in Tehran, who has become the servant of the Russian! Let the People of the Chain learn that my neck does not know how to bow! And what guest are you to sprinkle my sore with the salt of harsh words? A boy, who comes here no one knows why, on hired horses, with only one follower to attend him!"

Matthews flushed.

"Salman Taki Khan," he retorted, "it is true that I come to you humbly, and without a beard. And your beard is already white, and you can call out thirty thousand men to follow you. Yet a piece of gold will make you believe a lie. And I swear to you that whether I give you back this paper to put in your chest, or whether I spit on it and tear it in pieces and throw it to the wind of that valley, it is one."

To which the Father of Swords made emphatic enough rejoinder by snatching the parchment away, rising to his feet, and striding out of the room without a word.

IV

The festivities in honour of the Shah's coronation took place at Bala Bala with due solemnity. Among the black tents there was much plucking of plaintive strings, there was more stuffing of mutton and *pilau*, and after dark many little rockets, improvised out of gunpowder and baked clay, traced brief arabesques of gold against the black of the underlying gorges. The castle celebrated in the same simple way. The stuffing, to be sure, was more prolonged and recondite, while dancers imported from Dizful swayed and snapped their fingers, singing for the pleasure of the Father of Swords. The eyes of that old man of the mountain remained opaque as ever, save when he rebuked the almoner who sat at meat with him for indecorously quoting the lines of Sadi,

when he says: "Such was this delicate crescent of the moon, and fascination of the holy, this form of an angel, and decoration of a peacock, that let them once behold her, and continence must cease to exist in the constitutions of the chaste."

This rebuke might have been called forth by the presence of another guest of the board. Be that as it may, the eyes of the Father of Swords glimmered perceptibly when they rested on the unannounced visitor for whom he fished out, with his own henna'ed fingers, the fattest morsels of mutton and the juiciest sweets. I hasten to add that the newcomer was not the one whose earlier arrival and interview with the Father of Swords has already been recorded. He was, nevertheless, a personage not unknown to this record, whether as Senhor Magin of Brazil or as the emissary of the Shah of the Shahs of *Firengistan*. For not only had he felt impelled to bid good-bye a second time to his friend Adolf Ganz, prince among the merchants of Shustar. He had even postponed his voyage down the Karun long enough to make one more journey overland to Bala Bala. And he heard there, not without interest, the story of the short visit and the sudden flight of the young Englishman he had accidentally met on the river.

As for Matthews, he celebrated the coronation at Dizful, in bed. And by the time he had slept off his fag, Bala Bala and the Father of Swords and the green chest and the ingenious Magin looked to him more than ever like figures of myth. He was too

little of the timber out of which journalists, romancers, or diplomats are made to take them very seriously. The world he lived in, moreover, was too solid to be shaken by any such flimsy device as the one of which he had happened to catch a glimpse. What had been real to him was that he, Guy Matthews, had been suspected of playing a part in story-book intrigues, and had been treated rudely by an old barbarian of whom he expected the proverbial hospitality of the East. His affair had therefore been to show Mr. Scarlet Beard that if a Lur could turn his back, an Englishman could do likewise. He now saw, to be sure, that he himself had not been altogether the pattern of courtesy. But the old man of the mountain had got what was coming to him. And Matthews regretted very little, after all, missing what he had gone to see. For Dizful, peering at him through the arches of the bridge, reminded that there was still something to see.

It must be said of him, however, that he showed no impatience to see the neighbouring ruins of Susa. He was not one, this young man who was out for a bit of a lark, to sentimentalise about antiquity or the charm of the unspoiled. Yet even such young men are capable of finding the rumness of strange towns a passable enough lark, to say nothing of the general unexpectedness of life. And Dizful turned out to be quite as unexpected, in its way, as Bala Bala. Matthews found that out before he had been three days in the place, when a sudden roar set all

the loose little panes tinkling in Shir Ali Khan's garden windows.

Abbas explained that this was merely a cannon shot, announcing the new moon of Ramazan. That loud call of the faith evidently made Dizful a rummer place than it normally was. Matthews soon got used to the daily repetitions of the sound, rumbling off at sunset and before dawn into the silence of the plains. But the recurrent explosion became for him the voice of the particular rumness of that fanatical old border town—of fierce suns, terrific smells, snapping dogs, and scowling people. When the stranger without the gate crossed his bridge of a morning for a stroll in the town, he felt like a discoverer of some lost desert city. He threaded alleys of blinding light, he explored dim thatched bazaars, he studied tiled doorways in blank mud walls, he investigated quaint water-mills by the river, and scarce a soul did he see, unless a stork in its nest on top of a tall *badgir* or a naked dervish lying in a scrap of shade asleep under a lion skin. It was as if Dizful drowsed sullenly in that July blaze brewing something, like a geyser, and burst out with it at the end of the unendurable day.

The brew of the night, however, was a different mixture, quite the rummest compound of its kind Matthews had ever tasted. The bang of the sunset gun instantly brought the deserted city back to life. Lights began to twinkle—in tea houses, along the river, among the indigo plantations—streets filled

with ghostly costumes and jostling camels, and everywhere voices would celebrate the happy return of dusk so strangely and piercingly that they made Matthews think of "battles far away." This was most so when he listened to them, out of sight of unfriendly eyes, from his own garden. Above the extraordinary rumour that drifted to him through the arches of the bridge he heard the wailing of pipes, raucous blasts of cow horns, the thumping of drums; while dogs barked incessantly, and all night long the caravans of Mesopotamia jingled to and fro. Then the cannon would thunder out its climax, and the city would fall anew under the spell of the sun.

The moon of those Arabian nights was nearing it first quarter and Matthews was waiting for it to become bright enough for him to fulfill his true duty as a sight-seer by riding to the mounds of Susa, when Dizful treated him to fresh discoveries as to what an unspoiled town may contain. It contained, Abbas informed Matthews with some mystery after one of his prolonged visits to the bazaar, another *firengi*. This *firengi's* servant, moreover, had given Abbas explicit directions as to the whereabouts of the *firengi's* house, in order that Abbas might give due warning, as is the custom of the country, of a call from Matthews. Whereat Matthews made the surprising announcement that he had not come to Dizful to call on *firengis*. The chief charm of Dizful for him, as a matter of fact, was that there he felt himself free of the social obligations under which he had lain rather

longer than he liked. But if Abbas was able to resign himself to this new proof of the eccentricity of his master, the unknown *firengi* apparently was not. At all events, Matthews soon made another discovery as to the possibilities of Dizful. An evening or two later, as he loitered on the bridge watching a string of loaded camels, a respectable-looking old gentleman in a black *aba* addressed him in French. French in Dizful! And it appeared that this remarkable Elamite was a Jew, who had picked up in Baghdad the idiom of Paris! He went on to describe himself as the "agent" of a distinguished foreign resident, who, the linguistic old gentleman gave Matthews to understand, languished for a sight of the new-comer, and was unable to understand why he had not already been favoured with a call. His pain was the deeper because the newcomer had recently enjoyed the hospitality of this distinguished foreign resident on a little yacht in the river.

"The unmitigated bounder!" exclaimed Matthews, unable to deliver himself in French of that sentiment, and turning upon the stupefied old gentleman a rude Anglo-Saxon back. "He has cheek enough for anything."

He had enough, at any rate, to knock the next afternoon, unannounced, on Matthews's gate, to follow Matthews's servant into the house without waiting to hear whether Matthews would receive him, to present himself at the door of the dim underground *serdab* where Matthews lounged in his pyja-

mas till it should be cool enough to go out, to make Matthews the most ceremonious of bows, and to give that young man a half-amused, half-annoyed, consciousness of being put at his ease. The advantage of position, Matthews had good reason to feel, was with himself. He knew more about the bounder than the bounder thought, and it was not he who had knocked at the bounder's gate. Yet the sound of that knock, pealing muffled through the hot silence, had been distinctly welcome. Nor could our incipient connoisseur of rum towns pretend that the sight of Magin bowing in the doorway was wholly unwelcome, so long had he been stewing there in the sun by himself. What annoyed him, what amused him, what in spite of himself impressed him, was to see how the bounder ignored advantages of position. Matthews had forgotten, too, what an imposing individual the bounder really was. And measuring his tall figure, listening to his deep voice, looking at his light eyes and his two sinister scars and the big shaved dome of a head which he this time uncovered, our cool enough young man wondered whether there might be something more than fantastic about this navigator of strange waters. It was rather odd, at all events, how he kept bobbing up, and what a power he had of quickening—what? A schoolboyish sense of the romantic? Or mere vulgar curiosity? For he suddenly found himself aware, Guy Matthews, that what he knew about his visitor was less than what he desired to know.

The visitor made no haste, however, to volunteer any information. Nor did he make of Matthews any but the most perfunctory inquiries.

"And Monsieur— What was his name? Your Frenchman?" he continued.

"Gaston. He's not my Frenchman, though," replied Matthews. "He went back long ago."

"Oh!" uttered Magin. He declined the refreshments which Abbas at that point produced, even to the cigarette Matthews offered him. He merely glanced at the make. Then he examined, with a flicker of amusement in his eyes, the bare whitewashed room. A runnel of water trickled across it in a stone channel that widened in the centre into a shallow pool. "A bit of a lark, eh? I remember that *mot* of yours, Mr. Matthews. To sit steaming, or perhaps I should say dreaming, in a sort of Turkish bath in the bottom of Elam while over there in Europe——"

"Is there anything new?" asked Matthews, recognising his caller's habit of finishing a sentence with a gesture. "Archdukes and that sort of thing don't seem to matter much in Dizful. I have even lost track of the date."

"I would not have thought an Englishman so— *dolce far niente,*" said Magin. "It is perhaps because we archæologists feed on dates! I happen to recollect, though, that we first met on the eighteenth of July. And to-day, if you would like to know, is Saturday, the first of August, 1914." The flicker of amuse-

ment in his eyes became something more inscrutable. "But there is a telegraph even in Elam," he went on. "A little news trickles out of it now and then. Don't you ever catch, perhaps, some echo of the trickle?"

"That's not my idea of a lark," laughed Matthews.

Magin regarded him a moment.

"Well," he conceded, "Europe does take on a new perspective from the point of view of Susa. I see you are a philosopher, sitting amidst the ruins of empires and wisely preferring the trickle of your fountain to the trickle of the telegraph. If Austria falls to pieces, if Serbia reaches the Adriatic, what is that to us? Nothing but a story that in Elam has been told too often to have any novelty! Eh?"

"Why," asked Matthews, quickly, "is that on already?"

Magin looked at him again a moment before answering.

"Not yet! But why," he added, "do you say already?"

His voice had a curious rumble in the dim stone room. Matthews wondered whether it were because the acoustic properties of a *serdab* in Dizful differ from those of a galley on the Karun, or whether there really were something new about him.

"Why, it's bound to come sooner or later, isn't it? If it's true that all the way from Nish to Ragusa those chaps speak the same language and belong to

the same race, one can hardly blame them for wanting to do what the Italians and the Germans have already done. And, as a philosopher sitting amidst the ruins of empires, wouldn't you say yourself that Austria has bitten off rather more than she can chew?"

"Very likely I should." Magin took a cigar out of his pocket, snipped off the end with a patent cutter, lighted it, and regarded the smoke with a growing look of amusement. "But," he went on, "as a philosopher sitting amidst the ruins of empires, I would hardly confine that observation to Austria-Hungary. For instance, I have heard"—and his look of amusement verged on a smile—"of an island in the Atlantic Ocean not much larger than the land of Elam, an island of rains and fogs whose people, feeling the need of a little more sunlight perhaps, or of pin-money and elbow-room, sailed away and conquered for themselves two entire continents, as well as a good part of a third. I have also heard that the inhabitants of this island, not content with killing and enslaving so many defenceless fellow-creatures, or with picking up any lesser island, cape, or bay that happened to suit their fancy, took it upon themselves to govern several hundred million unwilling individuals of all colours and religions in other parts of the world. And, having thus procured both sunlight and elbow-room, those enterprising islanders assumed a virtuous air and pushed the high cries—as our friend Gaston would say—if any of their neighbours

ever showed the slightest symptom of following their very successful example. Have you ever heard of such an island? And would you not say—as a philosopher sitting amidst the ruins of empires!—that it had also bitten off rather more than it could chew?"

Matthews, facing the question and the now open smile, felt that he wanted to be cool, but that he did not altogether succeed.

"I dare say that two or three hundred years ago we did things we wouldn't do now. Times have changed in all sorts of ways. But we never set out like a Cæsar or a Napoleon or a Bismarck to invent an empire. It all came about quite naturally. Anybody else could have done the same. But nobody else thought of it—at the time. We simply got there first."

"Ah?" Magin smiled more broadly. "It seems to me that I have heard of another island, not so far from here, which is no more than a pin-point, to be sure, but which happens to be the key of the Persian Gulf. I have also heard that the Portuguese got there first, as you put it. But you crushed Portugal, you crushed Spain, you crushed Holland, you crushed France—or you meant to. And I must say it looks to me as if you would not mind crushing Germany. Why do you go on building ships, building ships, building ships, always two to Germany's one? Simply that you and your friends may go on eating up Asia and Africa—and perhaps Germany too!"

Matthews noticed that the elder man ended, at any rate, not quite so coolly as he began.

"Nonsense! The thing's so simple it isn't worth repeating. We have to have more ships than anybody else because our empire is bigger than anybody else's—and more scattered. As for eating, it strikes me that Germany has done more of that lately than any one. However, if you know so much about islands, you must also know how we happened to go into India—or Egypt. In the beginning it was pure accident. And you know very well that if we left them to-morrow there would be the devil to pay. Do we get a penny out of them?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Magin. "You administer them purely on altruistic principles, for their own good and that of the world at large—like the oil-wells of the Karun!"

"Well, since you put it that way," laughed Matthews in turn, "perhaps we do!"

Magin shrugged his shoulders.

"Extraordinary people! Do you really think the rest of the world so stupid? Or is it that the fog of your island has got into your brains? You always talk about truth as if it were a patented British invention, yet no one is less willing to call a spade a spade. Look at Cairo, where you pretend to keep nothing but a consul-general, but where the ruler of the country can't turn over in bed without his permission. A consul-general! Look at your novels! Look at what you yourself are saying to me!"

Matthews lighted a pipe over it.

"In a way, of course, you are right," he said. "But I am not sure that we are altogether wrong. Spades exist, but there's no inherent virtue in talking about them. In fact it's often better not to mention them at all. There's something very funny about words, you know. They so often turn out to mean more than you expected."

At that Magin regarded his companion with a new interest.

"I would not have thought you knew that, at your age! But after all, if you will allow me to say so, it is a woman's point of view. A man ought to say things out—and stick by them. He is less likely to get into trouble afterward. For example, it would have been not only more honest but more advantageous for your country if you had openly annexed Egypt in the beginning. Now where are you? You continually have to explain, and to watch very sharply lest some other consul-general tell the Khedive to turn over in bed. And since you and the Russians intend to eat up Persia, why on earth don't you do it frankly, instead of trying not to frighten the Persians, and talking vaguely about spheres of influence, neutral zones, and what not? I'm afraid the truth is that you're getting old and fat. What?" He glanced over his cigar at Matthews, who was regarding the trickle of the water beside them. "Those Russians, they are younger," he went on. "They have still to be reckoned with. And they aren't so

squeamish, either in novels or in life. Look at what they have done in their 'sphere.' They have roads, they have Cossacks, they have the Shah under their thumb. And whenever they choose they shut the Baghdad trail against your caravans—yours, with whom they have an understanding! A famous understanding! You don't even understand how to make the most of your own sphere. You have had the Karun in your hands for three hundred years, and what have you done with it? Why, in heaven's name, didn't you blast out that rock at Ahwaz long ago? Why haven't you made a proper road to Isfahan? Why don't you build that railroad to Khorremabad that you are always talking about, and finish it before the Germans get to Baghdad? Ah! If they had been here in your place you would have seen!"

"It strikes me," retorted Matthews, with less coolness than he yet had shown, "that you are here already—from what the Father of the Swords told me." And he looked straight at the man who had told him that an Englishman couldn't call a spade a spade. But he saw anew how that man could ignore an advantage of position.

Magin returned the look—frankly, humorously, quizzically. Then he said:

"You remind me, by the way, of a question I came to ask you. Would you object to telling me what you are up to here?"

"What am I up to?" queried Matthews, in aston-

ishment. The cheek of the bounder was really beyond everything! "What do you mean?"

Magin smiled.

"I am not an Englishman. I mean what I say."

"No you're not!" Matthews threw back at him. "No Englishman would try to pass himself off for a Brazilian."

Magin smiled again.

"Nor would a German jump too hastily at conclusions. If I told you I was from Brazil, I spoke the truth. I was born there, as were many Englishmen I know. That makes them very little less English, though it has perhaps made me more German. Who knows? As a philosopher sitting with you amidst the ruins of empires I am at least inclined to believe that we take our mother country more seriously than you do yours! But to return to our point: what are you doing here?"

"I'm attending to my business. Which seems to me more than you are doing, Mr. Magin."

Matthews noticed, from the reverberation of the room, that his voice must have been unnecessarily loud. He busied himself with the bowl of his pipe. As for Magin, he got up and began walking to and fro, drawing at his cigar. The red of it showed how much darker the room had been growing. It increased, too, the curious effect of his eyes. They looked like two empty holes in a mask.

"Eh, too bad!" sighed the visitor at last. "You disappoint me. Do you know? You are, of course,

much younger than I; but you made me hope that you were perhaps—how shall I put it?—a spirit of the first class. I hoped that without padding, without rancour, like true philosophers, we might exchange our points of view. However— Since it suits you to stand on your dignity, I must say that I am very distinctly attending to my business. And I am obliged to add that it does not help my business, Mr. Matthews, to have you sitting so mysteriously in Dizful—and refusing to call on me, but occasionally calling on nomad chiefs. I confess that you don't look to me like a spy. Spies are generally older men than you, more cooked, as Gaston would say, more fluent in languages. It does not seem to me, either, that even an English spy would go about his affairs quite as you have done. Still, I regret to have to repeat that I dislike your idea of a lark. And not only because you upset nomad chiefs. You upset other people as well. You might even end by upsetting yourself."

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Matthews, hotly. "The Emperor of Elam?"

"Ha! I see you are acquainted with the excellent Adolf Ganz!" laughed Magin. "No," he went on in another tone. "His viceroy, perhaps. But as I was saying, it does not suit me to have you stopping here. I can see, however, that you have reason to be surprised, possibly annoyed, at my telling you so. I am willing to be reasonable about it. How much do you want—for the expenses of your going away?"

Matthews could hardly believe his ears. He got up in turn.

"What in hell do you mean by that?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Matthews," answered the other slowly, "that my knowledge of your language does not permit me to make myself clear to you. Perhaps you will understand me better if I quote from yourself. I got here first. Did you ever put your foot into this country until two weeks ago? Did your countrymen ever trouble themselves about it, even after Layard showed them the way? No! They expressly left it outside of their famous 'sphere,' in that famous neutral zone. And all these centuries it has been lying here in the sun, asleep, forgotten, deserted, lost, given over to nomads and to lions—until I came. I am the first European since Alexander the Great who has seen what it might be. It is not so impossible that I might open again those choked-up canals which once made these burnt plains a paradise. In those mountains I have found—what I have found. What right have you to interfere with me, who are only out for a lark? Or what right have your countrymen? They have already, as you so gracefully express it, bitten off so much more than they can chew! The Gulf, the Karun, the oil-wells —they are yours. Take them. But Baghdad is ours: if not to-day, then to-morrow. And if you will exercise that logical process of which your British mind appears to be not altogether destitute, you can hardly help seeing that this part of your famous

neutral zone, if not the whole of it, falls into the sphere of Baghdad. You know, too, that we do things more thoroughly than you. Therefore I must very respectfully but very firmly ask you, at your very earliest convenience, to leave Dizful. I am quite willing to believe, however, that your interference with my arrangements was accidental. And I dislike to put you to any unnecessary trouble. So I shall be happy to compensate you, in marks, *tomans*, or pounds sterling, for any disappointment you may feel in bringing this particular lark to an end. Do you now understand me? How much do you want?"

He perceived, Guy Matthews, that his lark had indeed taken an unexpected turn. He was destined, far sooner than he dreamed, to be asked of life, and to answer, questions even more direct than this. But until now life had chosen to confront him with no problem more pressing than one of cricket or hunting. He was therefore troubled by an unwonted confusion of feelings. For he felt that his ordinary vocabulary—made up of such substantives as lark, cheek, and bounder, and the comprehensive adjective rum—fell short of coping with this extraordinary speech. He even felt that he might possibly have answered in a different way, but for that unspeakable offer of money. And the rumble of Magin's bass in the dark stone room somehow threw a light on the melancholy land without, somehow gave him a dim sense that he did not answer for himself

alone—that he answered for the tradition of Layard and Rawlinson and Morier and Sherley, of Clive and Kitchener, of Drake and Raleigh and Nelson, of all the adventurous young men of that beloved foggy island at which this pseudo-Brazilian jeered.

"When I first met you in the river, Mr. Magin," he said quietly, "I confess I did not realise how much of the spoils of Susa you were carrying away in your chests. And I didn't take your gold anklet as a bribe, though I didn't take you for too much of a gentleman in offering it to me. But all I have to say now is that I shall stay in Dizful as long as I please—and that you had better clear out of this house unless you want me to kick you out."

"Heroics, eh? You obstinate little fool! I could choke you with one hand!"

"You'd better try!" retorted Matthews.

He started in spite of himself when a muffled boom suddenly answered him, jarring even the sunken walls of the room. Then he remembered that voice of the drowsing city, bursting out with the pent-up brew of the day.

"Ah!" exclaimed Magin strangely—"The cannon speaks at last! You will hear, beside your fountain, what it has to say. That, at any rate, you will perhaps understand—you and the people of your island." He stopped a moment. "But," he went on, "if some fasting dervish knocks you on the head with his mace, or sticks his knife into your back, don't say I didn't warn you!"

And the echo of his receding stamp in the corridor drowned for a moment the trickle of the invisible water.

V

The destiny of some men lies coiled within them, invisible as the blood of their hearts or the stuff of their will, working darkly, day by day and year after year, for their glory or for their destruction. The destiny of other men is an accident, a god from the machine or an enemy in ambush. Such was the destiny of Guy Matthews, as it was of how many other unsuspecting young men of his time. It would have been inconceivable to him, as he stood in his dark stone room listening to Magin's receding stamp, that anything could make him do what Magin demanded. Yet something did—the last drop of the acrid essence Dizful had been brewing for him.

The letter that accomplished this miracle came to him by the hand of a Bakhtiari from Meidan-i-Naft. It said very little. It said so little, and that little so briefly, that Matthews, still preoccupied with his own quarrel, at first saw no reason why a stupid war on the Continent, and the consequent impossibility of telegraphing home except by way of India, should affect the oil-works, or why his friends should put him in the position of showing Magin the white feather. But as he turned over the Bakhtiari's scrap of paper the meaning of it grew, in the light of the very circumstances that made him hesitate, so por-

tentously that he sent Abbas for horses. And before the Ramazan gun boomed again he was well on his way back to Meidan-i-Naft.

There was something unreal to him about that night ride eastward across the dusty moonlit plain. He never forgot that night. The unexpectedness of it was only a part of the unreality. What pulled him up short was a new quality in the general unexpectedness of life. Life had always been, like the trip from which he was returning, more or less of a lark. Whereas it suddenly appeared that life might, perhaps, be very little of a lark. So far as he had ever pictured life to himself he had seen it as an extension of his ordered English countryside, beset by no hazard more searching than a hawthorne hedge. But the plain across which he rode gave him a new picture of it, lighted romantically enough by the moon, yet offering a rider magnificent chances to break his neck in some invisible nullah, if not to be waylaid by marauding Lurs or lions. It even began to come to this not too articulate young man that romance and reality might be the same thing, romance being what happens to the other fellow and reality being what happens to you. He looked up at the moon of war that had been heralded to him by cannon and tried to imagine what, under that same moon far away in Europe, was happening to the other fellow. For it was entirely on the cards that it might also happen to him, Guy Matthews, who had gone up the Ab-i-Diz for a lark! That experience

had an extraordinary air of having happened to someone else, as he went back in his mind to his cruise on the river, his meeting with the barge, his first glimpse of Dizful, the interlude of Bala Bala, the return to Dizful, the cannon, Magin. Magin! He was extraordinary enough, in all conscience, as Matthews tried to piece together, under his romantic-realistic moon, the various unrelated fragments his memory produced of that individual, connoisseur of Greek kylixes and Lur nose-jewels, quoter of Scripture and secret agent.

The bounder must have known, as he sat smoking his cigar and ironising on the ruins of empires, that the safe and settled little world to which they both belonged was already in a blaze. Of course he had known it—and he had said nothing about it! But not least extraordinary was the way the bounder, whom after all Matthews had only seen twice, seemed to colour the whole adventure. In fact, he had been the first speck in the blue, the forerunner—if Matthews had only seen it—of the more epic adventure into which he was so quickly to be caught.

At Shustar he broke his journey. There were still thirty miles to do, and fresh horses were to be hired —of some fasting *charvadar* who would never consent in Ramazan, Matthews very well knew, to start for Meidan-i-Naft under the terrific August sun. But he was not ungrateful for a chance to rest. He discovered in himself, too, a sudden interest in the trickle of the telegraph. And he was anxious to pick

up what news he could from the few Europeans in the town. Moreover, he needed to see Ganz about the replenishing of his money-bag; for not the lightest item of the traveller's pack in Persia is his load of silver *krans*.

At the telegraph office Matthews ran into Ganz himself. The Swiss was a short fair faded man, not too neat about his white clothes, with a pensive moustache and an ambiguous blue eye that lighted at sight of the young Englishman. The light, however, was not one to illuminate Matthews's darkness in the matter of news. What news trickled out of the local wire was very meagre indeed. The Austrians were shelling Belgrade, the Germans, the Russians, and the French had gone in. That was all. No, not quite all; for the bank-rate in England had suddenly jumped sky-high—higher, at any rate, than it had ever jumped before. And even Shustar felt the distant commotion, in that the bazaar had already seen fit to put up the price of sugar and petroleum. Not that Shustar showed any outward sign of commotion as the two threaded their way toward Ganz's house. The deserted streets reminded Matthews strangely of Dizful. What was stranger was to find how they reminded him of a chapter that is closed. He hardly noticed the blank walls, the archways of brick and tile, the tall *badgirs*, even the filth and smells. But strangest was it to listen to the hot silence, to look up at the brilliant stripe of blue between the adobe walls, while over there—!

The portentous uncertainty of what might be over there made his answers to Ganz's questions about his journey curt and abstracted. He gave no explanation of his failure to see the celebration at Bala Bala and the ruins of Susa, which Ganz supposed to be the chief objects of his excursion. Yet he found himself looking with a new eye at the anomalous exile whom the Father of Swords called the prince among the merchants of Shustar, noting the faded untidy air as he had never noted it before, wondering why a man should bury himself in such a hole as this. Was one now, he speculated, to look at everybody all over again? He was not the kind of man, Ganz, to interest the Guy Matthews who had gone to Dizful. But it was the Guy Matthews who came back from Dizful who didn't like Ganz's name or Ganz's good enough accent. Nevertheless he yielded to Ganz's insistence, when they reached the office and the money-bag had been restored to its normal portliness, that the traveller should step into the house to rest and cool off.

"Do come!" urged the Swiss. "I so seldom see a civilised being. And I have a new piano!" he threw in as an added inducement. "Do you play?"

He had no parlour tricks, he told Ganz, and he told himself that he wanted to get on. But Ganz had been very decent to him, after all. And he began to perceive that he himself was extremely tired. So he followed Ganz through the cloister of the pool to the

court where the great basin glittered in the sun, below the pillared portico.

"Who is that?" exlaimed Ganz suddenly. "What a tone, eh? And what a touch!"

Matthews heard from Ganz's private quarters a welling of music so different from the pipes and cow-horns of Dizful that it gave him a sudden stab of homesickness.

"I say" he said, brightening, "could it be any of the fellows from Meidan-i-Naft?"

The ambiguous blue eye brightened too.

"Perhaps! It is the river music from *Rheingold.* But listen," Ganz added with a smile. "There are sharks among the Rhine maidens!"

They went on, up the steps of the portico, to the door which Ganz opened softly, stepping aside for his visitor to pass in. The room was so dark, after the the blinding light of the court, that Matthews saw nothing at first. He stepped forward eagerly, feeling his way among Ganz's tables and chairs toward the end of the room from which the music came. They gave him, the cluttering tables and chairs, after the empty rooms he had been living in, a sharper renewal of his stab. And even a piano—! It made him think of Kipling and the *Song of the Banjo:*

> "I am memory and torment—I am Town!
> I am all that ever went with evening dress!"

But what mute inglorious Paderewski of the restricted circle he had moved in for the past months

was capable of such parlour tricks as this? Then, suddenly, he saw. He saw, swaying back and forth against the dark background of the piano, a domed shaven head that made him stop short—that head full of so many astounding things! He saw, travelling swiftly up and down the keys, rising above them to an extravagant height and pouncing down upon them again, those predatory hands that had pounced on the spoils of Susa! They began, in a moment, to flutter lightly over the upper end of the keyboard. It was extraordinary what a ripple poured as if out of those hands. Magin himself bent over to listen to the ripple, partly showing his face as he turned his ear to the keys. He showed, too, in the lessening gloom, a smile Matthews had never seen before, more extraordinary than anything. Yet even as Matthews watched it, in his stupefaction, the smile changed, broadened, hardened. And Magin, sitting up straight again with his back to the room, began to execute a series of crashing chords.

After several minutes he stopped and swung around on the piano-stool. Ganz clapped his hands, shouting "*Bis! Bis!*" At that Magin rose, bowed elaborately, and kissed his hands right and left. He ended by pulling up a table-cover near him, gazing intently under the table.

"Have you lost something?" inquired Ganz.

"I seem," answered Magin, "to have lost half my audience. What has become of our elusive English friend? Am I so unfortunate as to have been unable

to satisfy his refined ear? Or can it be that his emotions were too much for him?"

"He was in a hurry," explained Ganz. "He is just back from Dizful, you know."

"Ah?" uttered Magin. "He is a very curious young man. He is always in a hurry. He was in a hurry the first time I had the pleasure of meeting him. He was in such a hurry at Bala Bala that he didn't wait to see the celebration which you told me he went to see. He also left Dizful in a surprising hurry, from what I hear. I happen to know that the telegraph had nothing to do with it. I can only conclude that some one frightened him away. Where do you suppose he hurries to? And do you think he will arrive in time?"

Ganz opened his mouth; but if he intended to say something, he decided instead to draw his hand across his spare jaw. However, he did speak after all.

"I notice that you at least do not hurry, Majesty! Do you fiddle while Rome burns?"

"Ha!" laughed Magin. "It is not Rome that burns! And I notice, Mr. Ganz, that you seem to be of a forgetful as well as of an inquiring disposition. I would have been in Mohamera long ago if it had not been for your Son of Papa, with his interest in unspoiled towns. I will thank you to issue no more letters to the Father of Swords without remembering me. Do you wish to enrich the already overstocked British Museum at my expense? But I do not mind

revealing to you that I am now really on my way to Mohamera."

"H'm," let out Ganz slowly. "My dear fellow, haven't you heard that there is a war in Europe?"

"I must confess, my good Ganz, that I have. But what has Europe to do with Mohamera?"

"God knows," said Ganz. "I should think however, since you are so far from the Gulf, that you would prefer the route of Baghdad—now that French and Russian cruisers are seeking whom they may devour."

"You forget, Mr. Ganz, that I am so fortunate as to possess a number of valuable objects of virtue. I would think twice before attempting to carry those objects of virtue through the country of our excellent friends the Beni Lam Arabs!"

Ganz laughed.

"Your objects of virtue could very well be left with me. What if the English should go into the war?"

"The English? Go into the war? Never fear! This is not their affair. And if it were, what could they do? Sail their famous ships up the Rhine and the Elbe? Besides, that treacherous memory of yours seems to fail you again. This is Persia, not England."

"Perhaps," answered Ganz. "But the English are very funny people. There is a rumour, you know, of pourparlers. What if you were to sail down to the Gulf and some little midshipman were to fire a shot across your bow?"

"Ah, bah! I am a neutral! And Britannia is a fat old woman! Also a rich one, who doesn't put her hand into her pocket to please her neighbours. Besides, I have a little affair with the Sheikh of Mohamera—objects of virtue, indigo, who knows what? As you know, I am a versatile man." And swinging around on his stool, Magin began to play again.

"But even fat old women sometimes know how to bite," objected Ganz.

"Not when their teeth have dropped out," Magin threw over his shoulder—"or when strong young men plug their jaws!"

VI

Two days later, or not quite three days later, the galley and the motor-boat whose accidental encounter brought about the events of this narrative met again. This second meeting took place in the Karun, as before, but at a point some fifty or sixty miles below Bund-i-Kir. And now the moon, not the sun, cast its paler glitter between the high dark banks of the stream.

It was a keen-eared young Lur who first heard afar the pant of the mysterious jinni. Before he or his companions descried the motor-boat, however, Gaston, rounding a sharp curve above the island of Umm-un-Nakhl, caught sight of the sweeps of the barge flashing in the moonlight. The unexpected view of that flash was not disagreeable to Gaston. For, as Gaston put it to himself, he was

sad - despite the efforts of his friend, the telegraph operator at Ahwaz, to cheer him up. It is true that the operator, who was Irish and a man of heart, had accorded him but a limited amount of cheer, together with hard words not a few. Recalling them, Gaston picked up a knife that lay on the seat beside him—an odd curved knife of the country, in a leather sheath. There is no reason why I should conceal the fact that this knife was a gift from Gaston's Bakhtiari henchman, who had presented it to Gaston, with immense solemnity, on hearing that there was a war in *Firengistan* and that the young men of the oil works were going to it. What had become of that type of a Bakhtiari, Gaston wondered? Then, spying the flash of those remembered oars, he bethought him of the seigneur of a Brazilian whose hospitable yacht, he had reason to know, was not destitute of cheer.

When he was near enough the barge to make out the shadow of the high beak on the moonlit water he cut off the motor. The sweeps forthwith ceased to flash. Gaston then called out the customary salutation. It was answered, as before, by the deep voice of the Brazilian. He stood at the rail of the barge as the motor-boat glided alongside.

"Ah, *mon vieux*, you are alone this time?" said Magin genially. "Where are the others?"

"I do not figure to myself," answered Gaston, "that you derange yourself to inquire for my sacred devil of a Bakhtiari, who has taken the key of the fields. As for Monsieur Guy, the Englishman you

saw the other time, whose name does not pronounce itself, he has gone to the war. I just took him and three others to Ahwaz, where they meet more of their friends and all go together on the steamer to Mohamera."

"Really! And did you hear any news at Ahwaz?"

"The latest is that England has declared war."

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed Magin. His voice was extraordinarily loud and deep in the stillness of the river. It impressed Gaston, who sat looking up at the dark figure in front of the ghostly Lurs. What types, with their black hats of a theatre! He hoped the absence of M'sieu Guy and the Brazilian's evident surprise would not cloud the latter's hospitality. He was accordingly gratified to hear the Brazilian say, after a moment: "And they tell us that madness is not catching! But we, at least, have not lost our heads. Eh? To prove it, Monsieur Gaston, will you not come aboard a moment, if you are not in too much of a hurry, and drink a little glass with me?"

Gaston needed no urging. In a trice he had lashed his boat to the barge and was on the deck. The agreeable Brazilian was not too much of a seigneur to shake his hand in welcome, or to lead him into the cabin where a young Lur was in the act of lighting candles.

"It is so hot, and so many strange beasts fly about this river," Magin explained, "that I usually prefer to travel without a light. But we must see the way

to our mouths! What will you have? Beer? Bordeaux? Champagne?"

Gaston considered this serious question with attention.

"Since Monsieur has the goodness to inquire, if Monsieur has any of that *fine champagne* I tasted before——"

"Ah yes! Certainly." And he gave a rapid order to the Lur. Then he stood silent, his eyes fixed on the reed portière. Gaston was more impressed than ever as he stood too, *béret* in hand, looking around the little saloon, so oddly, yet so comfortably fitted out with rugs and skins. Presently the Lur reappeared through the reed portière, which aroused the Brazilian from his abstraction. He filled the two glasses himself, waving his attendant out of the cabin, and handed one to Gaston. The other he raised in the air, bowing to his guest. "To the victor!" he said. "And sit down, won't you? There is more than one glass in that bottle."

Gaston was enchanted to sit down and to sip another cognac.

"But, Monsieur," he exclaimed, looking about again, "you travel like an emperor!"

"Ho!" laughed Magin, with a quick glance at Gaston. "I am well enough here. But there is one difficulty." He looked at his glass, holding it up to the light. "I travel too slowly."

Gaston smiled.

"In Persia, who cares?"

"Well, it happens that at this moment I do. I have affairs at Mohamera. And in this tub it will take me three days more at the best—without considering that I shall have to wait till daylight to get through the rocks at Ahwaz." He lowered his glass and looked back at Gaston. "Tell me: Why shouldn't you take me down, ahead of my tub? Eh? Or to Sablah, if Mohamera is too far? It would not delay you so much, after all. You can tell them any story you like at Sheleilieh. Otherwise I am sure we can make a satisfactory arrangement." He put his hand suggestively into his pocket.

Gaston considered it between sips. It really was not much to do for this uncle of America who had been so amiable. And others had suddenly become so much less amiable than their wont. Moreover that Bakhtiari—he might repent when he heard the motor again. At any rate one could say that one had waited for him. And the Brazilian would no doubt show a gratitude so handsome that one could afford to be a little independent. If those on the steamer asked any questions when the motor-boat passed, surely the Brazilian, who was more of a seigneur than any employé of an oil company, would know how to answer.

"*Allons!* Why not?" he said aloud.

"Bravo!" cried the Brazilian, withdrawing his hand from his pocket. "Take that as part of my ticket. And excuse me a moment while I make arrangements."

He disappeared through the reed portière, leaving Gaston to admire five shining napoleons. It gave him an odd sensation to see, after so long, those coins of his country. When Magin finally came back, it was through the inner door.

"Tell me: how much can you carry?" he asked. "I have four boxes I would like to take with me, besides a few small things. These fools might wreck themselves at Ahwaz and lose everything in the river. It would annoy me very much—after all the trouble I have had to collect my objects of virtue! Besides, the tub will get through more easily without them. Come in and see."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Gaston, scratching his head, when he saw. "My boat won't get through more easily with them, especially at night." He looked curiously around the cozy stateroom.

"But it will take them, eh? If necessary, we can land them at Ahwaz and have them carried around the rapids."

The thing took some manœuvring; but the Lurs, with the help of much fluent profanity from their master, finally accomplished it without sinking the motor-boat. Gaston, sitting at the wheel to guard his precious engine against some clumsiness of the black-hatted mountaineers, looked on with humorous astonishment at this turn of affairs. He was destined, it appeared, to be disappointed in his hope of cheer. That cognac was really very good—if only one had had more of it. Still, one at least had com-

pany now; and he was not the man to be insensible to the fine champagne of the unexpected. Nor was he unconscious that of many baroque scenes at which he had assisted, this was not the least baroque.

When the fourth chest had gingerly been lowered into place, Magin vanished again. Presently he reappeared, followed by his majordomo, to whom he gave instructions in a low voice. Then he stepped into the stern of the boat. The majordomo, taking two portmanteaux and a rug from the Lurs behind him, handed them down to Gaston. Having disposed of them, Gaston stood up, his eyes on the Lurs who crowded the rail.

"Well, my friend," said Magin gaily, "for whom are you waiting? We shall yet have opportunities to admire the romantic scenery of the Karun!"

"Ah! Monsieur takes no—other object of virtue with him?"

"Have you so much room?" laughed Magin. "It is a good thing there is no wind to-night. Go ahead."

Gaston cast off, backed a few feet, reversed, and described a wide arc around the stern of the barge. It made a singular picture in the moonlight, with its black-curved beak and its spectral crew. They shifted to the other rail as the motor-boat came about, watching silently.

"To your oars!" shouted Magin at them. "Row, sons of burnt fathers! Will you have me wait a month for you at Mohamera?"

They scattered to their places, and Gaston caught

the renewed flash of the sweeps as he turned to steer for the bend. It was a good thing, he told himself, that there was no wind to-night. The gunwale was nearer the water than he or the boat cared for. She made nothing like her usual speed. However, he said nothing. Neither did Magin—until the dark shadow of Umm-un-Nakhl divided the glitter in front of them.

"Take the narrower channel," he ordered then. And when they were in it he added: "Stop, will you, and steer in there, under the shadow of the shore? I think we would better fortify ourselves for the work of the night. I at least did not forget the cognac, among my other objects of virtue."

They fortified themselves accordingly, the Brazilian producing cigars as well. He certainly was an original, thought Gaston, now hopeful of experiencing actual cheer. That originality proved itself anew when, after a much longer period of refreshment than would suit most gentlemen in a hurry, the familiar flash became visible in the river behind them.

"Now be quiet," commanded the extraordinary uncle of America. "What ever happens we mustn't let them hear us. If they take this channel, we will slip down, and run part way up the other. We shall give them a little surprise."

Nearer and nearer came the flash, which suddenly went out behind the island. A recurrent splash succeeded it, and a wild melancholy singing. The singing and the recurrent splash grew louder, filled the

silence of the river, grew softer; and presently the receding oars flashed again, below the island. But not until the last glint was lost in the shimmer of the water, the last sound had died out of the summer night, did the Brazilian begin to unfold his surprise.

"*Que diable allait-on faire dans cette galère!*" he exclaimed. "It's the first time I ever knew them to do the right thing! Let us drink one more little glass to the good fortune of their voyage. And here, by the way, is another part of my ticket." He handed Gaston five more napoleons. "But now, my friend, we have some work. I see we shall never get anywhere with all this load. Let us therefore consign our objects of virtue to the safe keeping of the river. He will guard them better than anybody. Is it deep enough here?"

It was deep enough. But what an affair, getting those heavy chests overboard! The last one nearly pulled Magin in with it. One of the clamps caught in his clothes, threw him against the side of the boat, and jerked something after it into the water. He sat down, swearing softly to himself, to catch his breath and investigate the damage.

"It was only my revolver," he announced. "And we have no need of that, since we are not going to the war! Now, my good Gaston, I have changed my mind. We shall not go down the river, after all. We will go up."

Gaston, this time, stared at him.

"Up? But, Monsieur, the barge——"

"What is my barge to you, dear Gaston? Besides, it is no longer mine. It now belongs to the Sheikh of Mohamera -with whatever objects of virtue it still contains. He has long teased me for it. And none of them can read the note they are carrying to him! Didn't I tell you I was going to give them a little surprise? Well, there it is. I am not a man, you see, to be tied to objects of virtue. Which reminds me: where are my portmanteaux?"

"Here, on the tank."

"Fi! And you a chauffeur! Give them to me. I will arrange myself a little. As for you, turn around and see how quickly you can carry me to the charming resort of Bund-i-Kir—where Antigonus fought Eumenes and the Silver Shields for the spoils of Susa, and won them. Did you ever hear, Gaston, of that interesting incident?"

"Monsieur is too strong for me" replied Gaston, cryptically. He took off his cap, wiped his face, and sat down at the wheel.

"If a man is not strong, what is he?" rejoined Magin. "But you will not find this cigar too strong," he added amicably.

Gaston did not. What he found strong was the originality of his passenger—and the way that cognac failed, in spite of its friendly warmth, to cheer him. For he kept thinking of that absurd Bakhtiari, and of the telegraph operator, and of M'sieu Guy, and the others, as he sped northward on the silent moonlit river.

"This is very well, eh, Gaston?" uttered the Brazilian at last. "We march better without our objects of virtue." Gaston felt that he smiled as he lay smoking on his rug in the bottom of the boat. "But tell me," he went on presently. "How is it, if I may ask, that you didn't happen to go in the steamer too, with your Monsieur Guy? You do not look to me either old or incapable."

There it was, the same question, which really seemed to need no answer at first, but which somehow became harder to answer every time! Why was it? And how could it spoil so good a cognac?

"How is it?" repeated Gaston. "It is, Monsieur, that France is a great lady who does not derange herself for a simple vagabond like Gaston, or about whose liaisons or quarrels it is not for Gaston to concern himself. This great lady has naturally not asked my opinion about this quarrel. But if she had, I would have told her that it is very stupid for everybody in Europe to begin shooting at everybody else. Why? Simply because it pleases *ces messieurs* the Austrians to treat *ces messieurs* the Serbs *de haut en bas!* What have I to do with that? Besides, this great lady is very far away, and by the time I arrive she will have arranged her affair. In the meantime there are many others, younger and more capable than I, whose express business it is to arrange such affairs. Will one *piou-piou* more or less change the result of the battle? Of course not! And if I should lose my hand or my head, who would buy me an-

other? Not France! I have seen a little what France does in such cases. My own father left his leg at Gravelotte, together with his job and my mother's peace. I have seen what happened to her, and how it is that I am a vagabond—about whom France has never troubled herself." He shouted it over his shoulder, above the noise of the motor, with an increasing loudness. "Also," he went on, "I have duties not so far away as France. Up there, at Sheleilieh, there will perhaps be next month a little Gaston. If I go away, who will feed him? I have not the courage of Monsieur, who separates himself so easily from objects of virtue. *Voilà!*"

Magin said nothing for a moment. Then:

"Courage, yes! One needs a little courage in this curious world." There was a pause, as the boat cut around a dark curve. "But do not think, my poor Gaston, that it is I who blame you. On the contrary, I find you very reasonable—more reasonable than many ministers of state. If others in Europe had been able to express themselves like you, Gaston, Monsieur Guy and his friends would not have run away so suddenly. It takes courage, too, not to run after them." He made a sound, as if changing his position, and presently he began to sing softly to himself.

"Monsieur would make a fortune in the *café-chantant*," commented Gaston. He began to feel, at last, after the favourable reception of his speech, a little cheered. He felt cooler, too, in this quiet rush-

ing moonlight of the river. "What is it that Monsieur sings? It seems to me that I have heard that air."

"Very likely you have, Gaston. It is a little song of sentiment, sung by all the sentimental young ladies of the world. He who wrote it, however, was far from sentimental. He was a fellow countryman of mine—and of the late Abraham!—who loved your country so much that he lived in it and died in it." And Magin sang again, more loudly, the first words of the song:

> "Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
> Dass ich so traurig bin;
> Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten,
> Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn."

Gaston listened with admiration, astonishment, and perplexity. It suddenly came back to him how this original Brazilian had sworn when the chest caught his clothes.

"But, Monsieur, I thought— Are you, then, a German?"

Magin, after a second, laughed.

"But, Gaston, am I then an enemy?"

Gaston examined him in the moonlight.

"Well," he answered slowly, "if your country and mine are at war——"

"What has that to do with us, as you just now so truly said? You have found that your country's quarrel was not cause enough for you to leave Persia, and so have I. *Voilà tout!*" He examined Gas-

ton in turn. "But I thought you knew all the time. Such is fame! I flattered myself that your Monsieur Guy would leave no one untold. Whereas he has left us the pleasure of a situation more piquant, after all, than I supposed. We enjoy the magnificent moonlight of the South, we admire a historic river under its most successful aspect, and we do not exalt ourselves because our countrymen, many hundreds of miles away, have lost their heads." He smiled over the piquancy of the situation. "Strength is good," he went on in his impressive bass, "and courage is better. But reason, as you so justly say, is best of all. For which reason," he added, "allow me to recommend to you, my dear Gaston, that you look a little where you are steering."

Gaston looked. But he discovered that his moment of cheer had been all too brief. A piquant situation, indeed! The piquancy of that situation somehow complicated everything more darkly than before. If there were reasons why he should not go away with the others, as they had all taken it for granted that he would do, was that a reason why he, Gaston, whose father had lost a leg at Gravelotte, should do this masquerading German a service? All the German's amiability and originality did not change that. Perhaps, indeed, that explained the originality and amiability.

The German, at any rate, did not seem to trouble himself about it. When Gaston next looked over his shoulder, Magin was lying flat on his back in the

bottom of the boat, with his hands under his head and his eyes closed. And so he continued to lie, silent and apparently asleep, while his troubled companion, *beret* on ear and hand on wheel, steered through the waning moonlight of the Karun.

VII

The moon was but a ghost of itself, and a faint rose was beginning to tinge the pallor of the sky behind the Bakhtiari mountains, when the motor began to miss fire. Gaston, stifling an exclamation, cut it off, unscrewed the cap of the tank, and measured the gasoline. Then he stepped softly forward to the place in the bow where he kept his reserve tins. Magin, roused by the stopping of the boat, sat up, stretching.

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed. "Here we are!" He looked about at the high clay banks enclosing the tawny basin of the four rivers. In front of him the konar trees of Bund-i-Kir showed their dark green. At the right, on top of the bluff of the eastern shore, a solitary peasant stood white against the sky. Near him a couple of oxen on an inclined plane worked the rude mechanism that drew up water to the fields. The creak of the pulleys and the splash of the dripping goatskins only made more intense the early morning silence. "Do you remember, Gaston?" asked Magin. "It was here we first had the good fortune to meet—not quite three weeks ago."

"I remember," answered Gaston, keeping his eye

on the mouth of the tank he was filling, "that I was the one who wished you peace, Monsieur. And that no one asked who you were, or where you were going."

Magin yawned.

"Well, you seem to have satisfied yourself now on those important points. I might add, however, for your further information, that I think I shall not go to Bund-i-Kir, which looks too peaceful to disturb at this matinal hour, but there to the western shore of the Ab-i-Shuteit. And that reminds me. I still have to pay you the rest of my ticket."

He reached forward and laid a little pile of gold on Gaston's seat. Gaston, watching out of the corner of his eye as he poured gasoline, saw that there were more than five napoleons in that pile. There were at least ten.

"What would you say, Monsieur," he asked slowly, emptying his tin, "if I were to take you instead to Sheleilieh—where there are still a few of the English?"

"I would say, my good Gaston, that you had more courage than I thought. By the way," he went on casually, "what is this?"

He reached forward again toward Gaston's seat, where lay the Bakhtiari's present. Gaston dropped his tin and made a snatch at it. But Magin was too quick for him. He retreated to his place at the stern of the boat, where he drew the knife out of its sheath.

"Sharp, too!" he commented, with a smile at Gaston. "And my revolver is gone!"

Gaston, very pale, stepped to his seat.

"That, Monsieur, was given me by my Bakhtiari brother-in-law—to take to the war. When he found I had not the courage to go, he ran away from me."

"But you thought there might be more than one way to make war, eh? Well, I at least am not an Apache. Perhaps the sharks will know what to do with it." The blade glittered in the brightening air and splashed out of sight. And Magin, folding his arms, smiled again at Gaston. "Another object of virtue for the safe custody of the Karun!"

"But not all!" cried Gaston thickly, seizing the little pile of gold beside him and flinging it after the knife.

Magin's smile broadened.

"Have you not forgotten something, Gaston?"

"But certainly not, Monsieur," he replied, putting his hand into his pocket. The next moment a second shower of gold caught the light. And where the little circles of ripples widened in the river, a sharp fin suddenly cut the muddy water.

"Oho! Mr. Shark loses no time!" cried Magin. He stopped smiling, and turned back to Gaston. "But we do. Allow me to say, my friend, that you prove yourself really too romantic. This is no doubt an excellent comedy which we are playing for the benefit of that gentleman on the bluff. But even he

begins to get tired of it. See? He starts to say his morning prayer. So be so good as to show a little of the reason which you know how to show, and start for shore. But first you might do well to screw on the cap of your tank—if you do not mind a little friendly advice."

Gaston looked around absent-mindedly, and took up the nickel cap. But he suddenly turned back to Magin.

"You speak too much about friends, Monsieur. I am not your friend. I am your enemy. And I shall not take you there, to the Ab-i-Shuteit. I shall take you into the Ab-i-Gerger—to Sheleilieh and the English."

Magin considered him, with a flicker in his lighted eyes.

"You might perhaps have done it if you had not forgotten about your gasoline. And you may yet. We shall see. But it seems to me, my—enemy!—that you make a miscalculation. Let us suppose that you take me to Sheleilieh. It is highly improbable, because you no longer have your knife to assist you. I, it is true, no longer have my revolver to assist me; but I have two arms, longer and I fancy stronger than yours. However, let us make the supposition. And let us make the equally improbable supposition that I fall into the hands of the English. What can they do to me? The worst they can do is to give me free lodging and nourishment till the end of the war! Whereas you, Gaston—you do not seem to have

reflected that life will not be so simple for you, after this. There is a very unpleasant little word by which they name citizens who do not respond to their country's call to arms. In other words, Mr. Deserter, you have taken the road which, in war time, ends between a firing-squad and a stone wall."

Gaston, evidently, had not reflected on that. He stared at his nickel cap, turning it around in his fingers.

"You see?" continued Magin. "Well then, what about that little Gaston? I do not know what has suddenly made you so much less reasonable than you were last night; but I, at least, have not changed. And I see no reason why that little Gaston should be left between two horns of a dilemma. In fact I see excellent reasons not only why you should take me that short distance to the shore, but why you should accompany me to Dizful. There I am at home. I am, more than any one else, emperor. And I need a man like you. I am going to have a car, I am going to have a boat, I am going to have a place in the sun. There will be many changes in that country after the war. You will see. It is not so far, either, from here. It is evident that your heart, like mine, is in this part of the world. So come with me. Eh, Gaston?"

"Heart!" repeated Gaston, with a bitter smile. "It is you who speak of the heart, and of— But you do not speak of the little surprise with which you might some day regale me, Mr. Enemy! Nor do

you say what you fear—that I might take it into my head to go fishing at Umm-un-Nakhl!"

"Ah bah!" exclaimed Magin impatiently. "However, you are right. I am not like you. I do not betray my country for a little savage with a jewel in her nose! It is because of that small difference between us, Gaston, between your people and my people, that you will see such changes here after the war. But you will not see them unless you accept my offer. After all, what else can you do?" He left Gaston to take it in as he twirled his metal cap. "There is the sun already," Magin added presently. "We shall have a hot journey."

Gaston looked over his shoulder at the quivering rim of gold that surged up behind the Bakhtiari mountains. How sharp and purple they were, against what a deepening blue! On the bluff the white-clad peasant stood with his back to the light, his hands folded in front of him, his head bowed.

"You look tired, Gaston," said Magin pleasantly. "Will you have this cigar?"

"No thank you," replied Gaston. He felt in his own pockets, however, first for a cigarette and then for a match. He was indeed tired, so tired that he no longer remembered which pocket to fumble in or what he held in his hand as he fumbled. Ah, that sacred tank! Then he suddenly smiled again, looking at Magin. "There is something else I can do!"

"What?" asked Magin as he lay at ease in the stern, enjoying the first perfume of his cigar. "You

can't go back to France, now, and I should hardly advise you to go back to Sheleilieh. At least until after the war. Then you will find no more English there to ask you troublesome questions!"

Gaston lighted his cigarette. And, keeping his eyes on Magin, he slowly moved his hand, in which were both the nickel cap and the still burning match, toward the mouth of the tank.

"This!" he answered.

Magin watched him. He did not catch the connection at first. He saw it quickly enough, however. In his pale translucent eyes there was something very like a flare.

"Look out—or we shall go together after all!"

"We shall go together, after all," repeated Gaston. "And here is your place in the sun!"

Magin still watched, as the little flame flickered through the windless air. But he did not move.

"It will go out! And you have not the courage, Apache!"

"You will see, Prussian!" The match stopped, at last, above the open hole. But the hand that held it trembled a little, and so did the strange low voice that said: "This at least I can do—for that great lady, far away. . ."

VIII

The peasant on the bluff, prostrated toward Mecca with his forehead in the dust, was startled out of his prayer by a roar in the basin below him. There

where the trimwhite jinn-boat of the *Firengi* had been was now a blazing mass of wreckage, out of which burst fierce cracklings, hissings, cries, sounds not to be named.

As he stared at it the wreckage fell apart, began to disappear in a cloud of smoke and steam that lengthened toward the southern gateway of the basin. And in the turbid water, cut by swift sharks' fins, he saw a sudden streak of scarlet, vivider than any fire or sunrise. The sounds ceased, the dyed waters paled, the smoke melted after the steam, the current caught the last charred fragments of wreckage and drew them out of sight.

The peasant watched it all in silence, as if waiting for some new sorcery of the *Firengi*, from his high bank of the Karun—that snow-born river bound for distant palms, that had seen so many generations of the faces of men, so many of the barks to which men trust their hearts, their hopes, their treasures, as it wound, century after century, from the mountains to the sea.

Then, at last, the peasant folded his hands anew and bowed his head toward Mecca.

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